Improvisational Youth Groups and the Search for Identity: A Study of an Urban Religious Sect in the Youth Culture

By

JOSEPH DAVID DAMRELL
A.B. (Sacramento State College) 1966
M.A. (University of California) 1968

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Sociology

in the

GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

Approved:

Bennett M Berger
James A. Fisher
Bruce M Hackett

Committee in Charge

Deposited in the University Library ....
Date Librarian

XUM

PLEASE NOTE:

Some pages may have
indistinct print.
Filmed as received.

University Microfilms, A Xerox Education Company

XUM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY 1

The Research Setting 16
Footnotes to Chapter I 23

Chapter II THE SUBJECTIVE MEANINGS OF HISTORY 24

An Historical Overview 44
Footnotes to Chapter II 48

Chapter III SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE 49

The Inner and Outer Circles 49
Sect Economics 51
Relationships between Inner Circle Households 61
Leadership and Authority 63
Roles 82
The Devotee 84
The Insider 85
The Hippie 86
Inner vs. Outer Circle 87
The Guru 88
The Disciple 89
The Hindu 91
Social Contexts 94
Meditating 95
Doing Japa 99
Worshipping and Praying 103
Talking of God 106
Feasting 111
Rapping and Hustling 113
Everyday Life: An Overview 117
A Day of Silence 123
A Day of Fasting and a Day of Feasting 128
A Day of Worship 132
Sundays 136
An Incident at Fred's 140
Sect Sovereignty 145
Footnotes to Chapter III 151

XUM

Chapter IV IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL PROCESS 153

Consensual Ideology 155
Hippie Ideology 161
Cosmic Liberty Ideology 169
Pan-Hindu Ideology 171
Ideology and the Inter-Subjective Realm 190
Ideology and Socialization 197
Ideology and Becoming Religious 203
The Self-Regulating Character of Piety 210
Footnotes to Chapter IV 219

Chapter V THE SECT AND THE YOUTH CULTURE 222

A Question of Sincerity 222
The World of the Young 225
Other Improvisational Youth Groups 232
Hippie Drug Dealers 233
Rock Bands 244
The Institutionalization of the Search for Identity . 254
Footnotes to Chapter V 265

Appendix I BIOGRAPHIES OF SOME INNER AND OUTER CIRCLE MEMBERS . 267

Appendix II METHODOLOGICAL NOTE 274

Footnotes to Appendix II 299

BIBLIOGRAPHY 301

XUM

CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

One of the unanticipated consequences of the creation of that ambiguous and problematic creature, the modern adolescent, was the emergence of the youth culture, his social habitat. The youth culture is a marginal network of social relations among a middle-class cohort of the young, together with the aggregate resources, both material and symbolic, that they have at their disposal and with which they cope, some more successfully than others, with the terms and conditions of the prolongation of their adolescence. Conceived in these terms, the youth culture is a kind of world-apart, the denizens and bearers of which are faced with long years of status ambiguity, psychological complexity, and existential uncertainty, all of which has been handed down to them by the adults who manage the main social institutions in the name of humanity and necessity. The post-industrial, capitalist society requires a highly skilled and specialized work force, as well as a pool of human manpower from which to draw any additional workers as may be needed. Thus, the youth are told that they must wait until they are well enough trained, or mature enough, or simply old enough to become committed to job, community, family, and nation. In the meantime, one can take advantage of the moratorium on growing up by "discovering who one is," in a word, by searching for one's identity. The youth culture is both the site and the

XUM

consequence of this process that has set increasing numbers of the middle-class young people in motion; that is, it is both the location and the substance, the subject and the object of the search for identity.

Facing the adolescent is the problem of acquiring over a long period of time the skills that are required to play the bonafide adult roles of husband or wife, parent, worker/breadwinner, and citizen, while at the same time postponing the utilization of those skills, and concentrating instead on probing the inner and outer reaches of one's own self, humanity, being. The images of youth merely having innocent fun evokes in most adults the idea that especially for the young, fun is therapeutic, natural, and not a little enviable. Youth are enjoined to take life easy, but not to cultivate idle habits; to live for the moment, but at the same time to act responsibly; to get involved in the world around them, but not so involved that the call to duty, when it finally comes, will not be heard. The adolescent's management of the tension that is inherent in the opposing; contradictory obligations of his social role and his concomitant ambiguous social status forms the foundation upon which is created the monument to his temporary human obsolescence.

That monument, the youth culture, is in part characterized by its members' disaffection, their alienation, and their attempts to combat it. It is the repository of anti-adult sentiments and ideologies, together with pro-youth attitudes and values. It is both the source and the outcome of the myth of the adolescent and his pro-longed immersion in a morass of self-assertive and self-denying roles, his ambiguous and crystal-clear statuses.[1] And, the youth culture is the matrix of the youthful experience, the definition of human nature applied specifically to an age-grade from which youth and adults alike derive their fundamental understanding of what it means, or should mean, to grow up. What Ruth Benedict called the "continuities and discontinuities in cultural conditioning" form the substance of the youth culture as matrix of experience, a substance as heterogeneous as the youth who are mediated by it.[2] It extends from high school to college and sometimes beyond. And, owing to its mercuric and salient appeal it attracts adherents and spokesmen even in junior high schools, which phenomenon has come to be known among social scientists as "anticipatory socialization." Moreover, it permeates the entire society--from the back seats of cars in drive-in theatres to the recording studios of Hollywood, San Francisco, and New York; from high school gymnasia to the Rose Bowl Parade; from suburban Sunday Schools to the Asian battlefronts.

The adolescent is both the father and the child of his domain, the youth culture. His "idealism," his unbridled feelings, his untried skills, and his imagination give the youth culture its peculiar vitality and its "cultural resonance."[3] And all of this, in turn, reinforces in the adolescent the notion that he is the product, the outcome of his own idealism, of his own unrestrained moral impulses, of his specially created "culture."

But there is an estrangement that is fundamental to the relationship between the adolescent and the youth culture, an estrangement that has its origins, again, in the prolongation of adolescence, and the search for identity that this prolongation sets in motion. After all, most do not search for their identities with the expectation that something will be found, and there may actually emerge a vested interest (for both the society and the adolescent) in putting off the discovery of the proverbial Self, indeed if such a discovery can in fact be made.

At any rate, the epistomological limbo notwithstanding, instead of finding the Self _qua_ Self, most young people discover (or are told) that their ties with the youth culture are gradually being loosened and in their place is growing a commitment to the institutions of family, community, work, and nation. The search for identity does not end with its sudden discovery, in other words, but with the gradual acquisition of adult status and the playing of adult roles.

But some youths, instead of becoming oriented to adult institutions, develop an abiding commitment to the youth culture. They turn the search for identity that characterizes their involvement in that culture into a long and sometimes life-long career. This means that they find the search for identity more satisfying than the playing of adult roles, their ambiguous status as perennial adolescents more appealing than adulthood, their commitment to the youth culture more demanding than the obligations and responsibilities that define adult institutions. How some youth happen to remain in the youth culture as more or less permanent residents while others leave it at the appropriate time is not precisely known. It is becoming increasingly well-known, however, that in some respects the youth culture is far from vulnerable, far from benign in terms of its power to attract some of its adherents and proponents and to enable them to remain oriented to it. Working class culture, the drug culture, criminal subcultures of various kinds, bohemian and hippie subcultural millieux all help to provide the additionally necessary ingredients that serve to hold the process of growing up in check. And, when these are coupled with the society's demands that adolescents delay their progress toward adult standing in family, community and nation, the result is the setting in motion of a powerful social and cultural force that draws increasing numbers of adolescents (and their pre-adolescent and post-adolescent counterparts) away from the traditional institutions and into the amorphous, heterogenous cultural system that stands in virtual opposition to the dominant social order.

Adolescence requires that the young person relate to his own inexperience, his emotional predisposition, his curiousity and impetuosity, his newly emergent sexual and intellectual energies as though they, and not their application or their outcome, are the common denominators of personal existence. Adults have a sense of who adolescents are and how they should behave. And, for their own part, adolescents must strive to be, and once having become, to remain for an indefinite period, adolescents, with all of the rights, duties, joys, and hangups ascribed and, thereby, pertaining thereto. So basic to the adult world view is the definition of the adolescent as a gangling, troublesome, non-person that the concept of the adolescent is reified in nearly every aspect of social reality. Adolescents, or rather the persons of tender years who are called adolescents, get special treatment according to the devices available to adults. In the courts, in schools, in political groups, in service clubs, in newspapers, in neighborhoods, and even in scientific theories, the attempt is made to create in the adolescent a characterological representation of the values that these institutions embrace, and in the same operation to instill in each person, however randomly and haphazardly, the proper balance between individual autonomy, and, in the name of an ambiguous collective solidarity, self-restraint. At the same time, the adolescent is launched on a search for self that is by and large fruitless because what he may do in the course of searching is by adult conception non-serious, temporary, superficial. He is enjoined to ascribe meaning to that which has none, or to that which is made meaningful by others who are more sober, responsible, and mature than he. If this frustrates him and he protests, he is told that this is a part of what it means to be young. If he rebels--either because he wants the rewards of the society and the means of achieving them earlier than they are made available to him, or because he has set his sights on other goals that the society may oppose--he may be labeled a deviant and find himself subjected to an even broader array of social pressures and controls. If he conforms to every adult demand that is made upon him, he can expect to lose not only the respect of many of his adolescent peers, but the respect of adults as well.

XUM

It is small wonder, then, that the youth culture is the scene of conflict as well as of accommodation, of inter- and intra-generational tension as well as of solidarity. The youth culture is the setting of the creation, prolongation and dissolution of adolescence. Strictly speaking, it is only nominally marginal to the dominant culture, because it directly serves as a social watershed, as a stock of human reserves, and as a storehouse of human potential. But, as I said, because it emerged as the unintended by-product of rapid industrialization, the youth culture remains a source of potential rebellion, of discontinuity between the generations, of mass disavowal of the traditional cultural goals and their means of acquisition as well.

So, in recent years (as well as in the past, though, perhaps to a lesser extent) more and more concern has been expressed as to the functions (and dysfunctions) of the youth culture. The student movement, the hippie movement, the Third World movement, the "Jesus" and "Krishna" movements, the commune movement, and a virtual maelstrom of protest, rebellion, deviation, salvation, dissent, experimentation, and a variety of other collective phenomena that have been brought to the attention of the adults and have shocked the hell out of some of them, have as their principle components the youth and their culture. In the not-too-distant past, the youth culture was accessible to adolescents who remained, for the most part, under adult control. Now, in the wake of a phenomenal increase in the size of the youthful cohort, the denizens of the youth culture, particularly those who are disenchanted with the

XUM

adult world, but are still a minority of the total youth population, adopt life styles that appear to mock rather than emulate, oppose rather than complement, the values and goals of the dominant social order.

Youthful life styles are as varied, as uniform, as disastrous and as successful as the adolescents who invent or adopt them. They not only exert an influence on the inhabitants of the youth culture, but on those who lie outside its parameters--not only on students, hippies, political radicals, communards, "free spirits," deviants, and the rest, but on parents, officials, administrators, agents of social control, social scientists and ordinary citizens alike. The youthful life styles emerge in response to the ambiguous but exacting requirements that ultimate meaning be found, that the proverbial Self be explored, and that profound experience be had during the adolescent period of the life cycle. But, there are few norms governing how these requirements can be met; at least the society at large does not provide them. Instead, the youth culture establishes the means and the ends of adolescent participation in the prolonged "psychosocial role moratorium."[4]

In the youth culture, adolescents relate to one another on the basis of age and sex, and herein lies a fundamental difference between the youth culture and the traditional culture. In the latter, actors generally follow clearly defined roles--occupational, family, and community roles--that form the basis of social life. The norms that govern them are readily understood by most adults, and the values they embody form much of what can be termed "common sense." Whereas, in the traditional culture, rewards are given to the competent who legitimately seek and achieve the ends that the collectivity has established for itself, in the youth culture rewards are often ascriptive, based as they are on the celebration of the human virtues that come to be associated with the age and sex of the actors. While age and sex factors define the adolescent identity, this is not to say that considerable numbers of adolescents in the youth culture do not earn merit on the basis of their skills, or by virtue of their achievements; quite a few of them do. But underlying even this is an assumption that the skills and merits the young acquire are acquired precisely because the young are young. One can, for instance, acquire the status of the "beautiful person," the "groovy guy" (or "gal"), and the role that this status accompanies may involve the exercising of simple interactional skills, or even of passively living up to a particular image that a particular audience made up of one's peers is eager to mythologize. Even the youthful, contemporary artists, i.e. Zappa, Warhol, Dylan, and Lennon, who have commanded respect from young and old audiences alike are consigned to the special category that is reserved for the potentially, as opposed to the actually great, the near, as compared with the actual genius. The young are not, in short, artists, poets, musicians, deviants, laggards, or what have you, but young artists poets, musicians, deviants, laggards. Everything the young do is mediated by the social meaning of youth; every action by a young person is placed within the context of his adolescence; and nearly every interest and need that the young attempt to pursue and fulfill is understood with reference to the period of the role moratorium, of the search for self, and the type of human nature that supposedly belongs to it. All of this, again, not only derives from the youth culture, characterizes and defines it--It is the youth culture.

The creation of the adolescent and the institutionalization of his role, (defined and actualized as) the search for identity, has aroused in a large proportion of young people (although, to be sure, a minority) new drives and character traits that are not necessarily going to lead directly to adult status. As Philip Selznick has said:

> Institutionalization is a process. It is something that happens to an organization over time, reflecting the organization's own distinctive history, the people who have been in it, the groups it embodies and the vested interests they have created, and the way it has adapted to its environment . . . The degree of institutionalization depends on how much leeway there is for personal and group interaction. The more precise an organization's goals, and the more specialized and technical its operations, the less opportunity will there be for social forces to affect its development . . . In what is perhaps its most significant meaning, 'to institutionalize' is to infuse with meaning beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand. The prizing of social machinery beyond its technical role is largely a reflection of the unique way in which it fulfills personal or group needs. Whenever individuals become attached to an organization or a way of doing things as persons rather than as technicians, the result is a prizing of the device for its own sake. From the standpoint of the committed person, the organization is changed from an expendable tool into a valued source of personal satisfaction.[5]

Although Selznick was describing how the conditions for the emergence of leadership in administration are created, we can readily see a parallel with adolescents' and post-adolescents' becoming committed to the search for identity as such in the course of their participation in the youth culture. As I have implied, age and sex criteria are far from technical requirements; rather, they are human categories that come to be associated with personal values and group needs. More than this, they form the basis of the youth culture's tendency to demand from its participants the playing of the youthful role for its own sake rather than for the instrumental goal of future adult roles and status. And, because there are few guidelines other than the ones provided by the youth culture itself--and these are, to be sure, nominal at best--there is a built-in improvisational character to the life styles that belong to it. This means that the young actors in their youth-culture settings must improvise as best they can a life style that satisfies the demands imposed upon their age grade. Since these requirements center around prolonging one's adolescence through a search for meaning in that prolongation (or in the self that is being constrained to remain outside the adult institutions), improvisational means tend to be expressive of the value of individual participation in the youth culture for the sake of participation alone. Instrumental roles are eschewed and in their place come "essential" roles, the value attached to which is self-evident to the participants. Far from learning how to perform the instrumental, universalistic roles that are required of adults in society, many participants in the youth culture adopt essential, particularistic roles. Instead of placing value in sobriety, restraint and the putting off of one's own interests in service to the requirements of the group which are prerequisites to adult-hood, the members of the youth culture place value in expressive behavior, living for the present, and in the sacred ascendency of the individual.

The sexual license of the young, their sometimes chronic excesses and their penchant for doing the opposite of what adults would like is, in other words, perfectly understandable in the light of what the prolongation of adolescence requires of them, although it may still be disappointing and upsetting. What is not easily understood, nor should it be, is how the life styles of the young, that is, how the youth culture, engenders the anti-adult response among some young people, and, further, how it enables them to live in more or less permanent opposition to the adult world. What is the source of the youth culture's viability? Since we know, for instance, that its vulnerability is grounded in the biological fact of adulthood, how, then, is it possible to remain a perennial non-adult?

The answer to this question lies, I think, in the structure of the groups that are found in the youth culture, in the collective orientation of the members of the groups that is facilitated by that structure, and in the improvisational character of the youth culture itself. As I said, the absence of normative guidelines which would theoretically enable a young person to cope with the fact of his prolonged adolescence is aggravated by the existence of tremendous social pressures that demand that he make something meaningful of this period of his life and perhaps even more importantly, that he make something meaningful of himself. These pressures stem not only from the larger society (particularly the educational and family institutions) which defines adolescence in large part as a search for identity, but also from the youth culture itself which generally demands a great deal in terms of loyalty and commitment from its members. In response to these pressures, youth groups in the youth culture are often specifically organized around the identity theme, and improvisations on this theme become a predominant structural variable which defines the mode of each individual member's participation and commitment. This means that many of the roles played by members of youth groups in the youth culture are done so on an improvisational basis according to the individual and collective definitions and meanings that are ascribed to the roles' identity or character-implicating variants. So important is this improvisational feature that I have termed the groups that are found in the youth culture improvisational youth groups.

I am speaking, of course, about youth groups that appear to be for the most part "deviant."[6] These groups (and the improvisational techniques which they promote and deploy) provide the social basis for their members' acquisition of the skills, identities, ideologies and, of course, experiences, (among other things) that are prerequisites to their prolonged (and possibly life-long) participation in a milieu that is set apart from the dominant themes, ideas and morality of the adult, middle-class order. Although all of the youth groups must necessarily contain an element of structure and direction (no matter how strong the anti-structural bias may be among the members), they also contain a built-in improvisational or spontaneous character which facilitates and promotes the development and definition of diverse new roles, the

XUM

trying on of newly created or borrowed personal and collective identities (together with the ideologies that reinforce them), the development on a broad scale of the sense of personal inner detachment (a kind of mobility of mentality) with respect to the playing of roles and the nurturance of identities, and finally, the experimentation with and adherence to new role models and life styles.

Again, while most role playing in the larger society outside the family is governed by the universalistic and achievement-oriented criteria set forth by the structures of the political community and the market economy, the orientation in improvisational youth groups is toward the collectivity (the "peer group") or toward the youth culture as a whole, where role playing seems to be governed by the particularistic and ascriptive criteria associated with the family, but with the addition of an improvised, and therefore informal, collectivist orientation. Although many groups in the youth culture term themselves "extended families" or "tribes," the referent is not limited to the traditional family, but includes the realm of "vertical knowledge."

Vertical knowledge refers to the direct experience of something (usually that proverbial Self or Identity of the individual or his group), whereas "horizontal knowledge" refers to knowledge about something.[7] The youth culture tends to eschew the latter knowledge as calculating, rational, and, following therefrom, anti-human; and, at the same time, it elevates personal experience, revelation, insight and spontaneous intuition to the status of the sacred or quasi-sacred.

XUM

Improvisation as an approach to daily life, and of course, the outcome of improvisational role and status orientations which is the identity qua identity that the youth culture promotes, is especially suited to vertical knowledge and the acquisition thereof. Drug-induced "trips," religious experiences, amorphous but emotionally intense "happenings," and the like, all testify to the importance of vertical knowledge. Moreover, in the youth culture, because members are expected to improvise their own roles and their own identities from the experiences they encounter, authority is seldom clearly delineated, the members usually operating on the basis of informal, consensual agreements that are arrived at in more or less "spontaneous" fashion.

What the adult world would perhaps refer to as "finding one's identity," the youth culture members might understand as becoming committed (through prolonged participation) to the search for identity as such. The main experiences of the members of improvisational youth groups consist of the direct, "vertical" sort that are believed to contribute to the meaning-making process. Hence, essential activities are prized over instrumental ones; expressive behavior is rewarded far more than restrained, calculating behavior. The tremendous emotional energies that are released under such conditions come to be regarded in some of these groups as symbolically representative of the collective lot of youth, of the collective, youthful experience. Hence, things in the youth culture are done for their own sake, rational explanation and action is avoided insofar as possible, and an attempt is made by the members to deal only in so-called "ultimate concerns."

With age, sex and self as the loci of experience comes an abiding commitment to the process by which the experiences are engendered. Hence, some youths remain loyal to the youth culture past the time when it would be expected that they would "settle down" to the routines of adult living.

The present study is intended both to document and to amplify the preceding assertions so that the sociological study of adolescents and their culture will be given a badly needed empirical impetus. This is not to say that the study was done expressly to "prove" any of the above assertions; rather, this introduction, together with the final chapter are intended to suggest the sociological mooring of what I learned, which is a result of the combination of what I observed and what remains of my theoretical preconceptions which survived that observation. In the pages that follow, I will present a detailed ethnography of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty*, an urban religious sect comprised of young, self-styled Hindus whom I understand to be coping with the problem of prolonged adolescence by searching for their identity through an improvisational youth group which gives them an alternative to conventional "growing up."

The Research Setting

The present (1972) headquarters of the Cosmic Liberty Church are located in a rented eighty-dollar-a-month upstairs flat that Shivadas, one of the sect's two directors, his wife Peaches,[8] a co-founder, and their two year old son, Jonathan, call home. The dwelling is a large stucco unit at the base of which are two garages, some storage bins, a few dented trash cans, and a laundry. The church is surrounded on three sides by multi-story apartment buildings with salmon-colored, glitter-encrusted walls, but on the free side one can look west down the alley to see broken glass, rusted and abandoned automobiles, a few patches of dried up lawn, broken down picket fences, the seaside slum known as the Speedway and eventually, the Pacific Ocean. A rickety, unpainted staircase leads from the interior yard opposite the alley to the front porch. In one corner of the porch is a diaper pail, a discarded hibachi grill, a tinkling, cast-bronze windchime and a few potted plants that are getting the worst of a struggle against the smog-laden salt air. Visible in the east from the front porch is the main Venice-Santa Monica boulevard with its festering traffic, quaint antique shops, bait stores, bars and hip boutiques. A few palm trees squeezed in between rows of townhouses line the hill above the street. Between the street corners there are telephone and power poles, the remnants of plastered signs that hang in shreds from crumbling brick walls and vacant lots that house a respectable assortment of dogs, tin cans, spent wine bottles, bags of refuse and junked cars. An occasional hippie or senior citizen can usually be seen passing by on the way to the market or the beach.

---

*The proper names used in this study are pseudonyms.

A flaming "Om" in red, blue and yellow imitation stained glass is emblazoned on the front door of the church which opens onto an expansive room. The room is divided into two equally large alcoves by an old fashioned table above which dangle a dozen or so five foot strands of multicolored glass beads. Framed blowups of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and the patriot saint, Swami Vivekananda, together with Indian pop-art posters depicting famous scenes out of Hindu mythology adorn the freshly painted cream-colored walls. A rectangular oak table surrounded by ten or so straight-backed chairs and piled high with books, coffee cups and ash trays is in the center of the alcove nearest the entrance. Opposite the oak table and beneath solid red curtains, is an imposing bookcase containing papers, notes, books on religion, hagiology and yoga, and a portrait of a few members of the "church" with their guru. Next to the front door and directly beneath a poster of Laksmi, the Hindu Goddess of Wealth, is an ancient radio in a chest-high cabinet on top of which is a hand-woven basket containing a neatly lettered sign reading, 'Donations,' a Mexican God's Eye, a few coins and a one dollar bill.

On the other side of the bead partition, in the adjacent alcove, is an over-stuffed afghan-covered couch that rests below two windows adorned in curtains of red paisley print. Pillows of various sizes, colors and shapes, two Moslem style prayer rugs, a couple of sheep skins and a madras cloth covered chair, together with the couch form an elongated semi-circle around the altar which juts out to the near center of the room from one wall. A thick, well-worn carpet deadens the din of the traffic and the ocean, thus creating an acoustic and visual island in the semi-circle where shelter from the imposing sights and sounds of the outside world can be found.

The shrine itself is a tiered structure about two feet or so wide and three or more feet high, but it dominates the room if not the entire flat, as much by its self-validating integrity and completeness of design as by its size. The several tiers are covered by a red cloth embroidered with arabesques and edged in black silk fringe. Carefully arranged on the cloth are several pairs of votive candles; framed pictures of Jesus, Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, Yada (the "spirit" in the deceased medium who was the first spiritual mentor of the church), and the Swami; an image of Buddha; a larger bronze image of Shiva dancing in his ring of fire; several brass and silver candlesticks; and a number of glass and pottery vases filled with roses, mums and ferns. Behind the shrine at about eye level is a pop-art poster of a mandala. In front is an enameled brass incense burner filled with sand and usually two or three sticks of fragrant, smouldering incense. A poster of the baby Krishna is half-visible through a display of peacock feathers that are standing in a small urn on one of the upper tiers.

Standing to the immediate right of the shrine is an enigmatic contemporary sculpture in rusted cast iron of two copulating figures. To the left is a sprawling chair and cushion that support a guitar and provides one with a comodious vantage point from where he can see the ocean or at least partake of the breeze that parts the paisley curtains and wafts streamers of incense smoke throughout the flat.

The kitchen is one that could be found in the home of any young, hippie couple. The walls and cabinets are painted an orange, green, yellow and white. There are jars of spices, coffee beans, and brown rice on the counter. Copper, steel and aluminum pots and pans hang from hooks on one wall. The coffee pot is usually on the stove together with a pan of water for warming baby bottles. In one corner of the kitchen, there is another small shrine consisting of a folding frame picture of Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi, an incense burner, a trivet and two candles, behind which is a small poster of Lord Krishna. It is here that Peaches offers the food eaten by her family and the members of the church.

Jonathan's room is just off the kitchen and is a sort of converted storage area that probably once served as a kind of large pantry. Neatly arranged inside are a crib, some toy trucks, a teddy bear and some clothing. On one wall there is a picture of Ramakrishna and an Indian poster. On the floor in one corner is a makeshift bed that is generally occupied by children of other members of the church who come over for meditation, prayer or less formal socializing.

The simplicity and modesty of the bedroom's decor may suggest Shivadas' and Peaches' celibacy since the birth of their son. Another small shrine occupies the center of the dresser, and the screen of an old television set is covered by a pile of ironing residing on the console. A treadle sewing machine is in one corner. Nearby, in the bathroom is a pile of religious material--periodicals, newsletters and tiny paperback books containing the sayings of various Bengali saints.

The flat serves the sect as a home for the director and his wife and child, and as the central meeting place for the other members who have similar homes and apartments in other parts of Venice, Santa Monica and Los Angeles. It is large enough to give Shivadas, Peaches and Jonathan ample room to function in their private lives, while being small enough to contribute to the intimacy that emerges when the forty or so church members gather in the front room for services or around the oak table for discussions over food or drink. Not unlike a typically Western home, the flat provides a kind of refuge from the outside world for its inhabitants, but in addition, because of the decor like a monastery or convent, the flat represents a place where a complete transformation of identity is encouraged, where the ultimate concerns of life, as opposed to the routine affairs of day-to-day reality, are given undiluted emphasis, where existence is charged with an immediacy that is intentionally unparalleled in its impact upon the Self.

The atmosphere in the church is maintained in a state of perpetual nascency, due at once to the effect of the acoustics, the lingering soporific odor of incense and the attitude of cheerful sobriety and guilelessness nurtured on the parts of members. This is in sharp contrast to the picture of chaos and decay, of ambulatory pathology, of urban blight that can be glimpsed in the surrounding city. Venice has a population consisting predominantly of transients, one of the highest crime rates in the nation, the highest unemployment rate in California, few adequate schools, filthy streets, a city council that wants the area "redeveloped" (read: further commercialized), and a rag-tag assortment of hundreds, perhaps even thousands of left over beatniks, new wave hippies and revolutionairies, far-out poets, unsung heroes of the canvas, raving mystics, pathetic drug addicts, pimps, prostitutes, winos, writers, pot-bellied old men in bermuda shorts, wrinkled old ladies in sun suits and various and sundry other do-gooders and n'er-dowells who like everything or nearly everything, just the way it is.

The site of the sect provides the members with a perspective from which they can circumscribe the encroaching city and actively refute the common-sense of the rat-race it harbors. Moreover, it functions as an actual buffer, a place of sanctuary, a kind of retreat from the city of man, a gateway to the city of God.[9]

Footnotes to Chapter I

1. Among the important articles on the sociology of youth culture and adolescence are: Bennett M. Berger, "On the Youthfulness of Youth Cultures," Looking for America: Essays on Youth, Suburbia, and Other American Obsessions (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971); S.N. Eisenstadt, From Generation to Generation (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964); David Matza, "Subterranean Traditions of Youth," The Annals (American Academy of Political and Social Science) 338 (1961): 102-118; Talcott Parsons, "Youth in the Context of American Society." In Erik Erikson, ed., Youth: Change and Challenge (New York: Basic Books, 1963); William Westley and Fredrick Elkin, "The Myth of Adolescent Culture," American Sociological Review 20: (1955) 680-684; Milton Yinger, "Contra-culture and Subculture," American Sociological Review 25: (1960) 625-635. An inter-disciplinary approach to youth culture appears in Gary Schwartz, Youth Culture: An Anthropological Approach (Addison-Wesley Modular Publications) 17: (1972) 1-47.

2. Ruth Benedict, "Continuities and Discontinuities in Cultural Conditioning," Psychiatry 1: (May, 1938).

3. Berger, Looking for America, pp. 118-140.

4. Erik Erikson, "Youth Fidelity and Diversity." In Erik Erikson, ed., Youth: Change and Challenge.

5. Philip Selznick, Leadership in Administration (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), pp. 16-17.

6. Eisenstadt, From Generation to Generation, pp. 269-323.

7. The concepts of "vertical" and "horizontal" knowledge come to me from William James via Alfred Schutz, "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology," American Journal of Sociology 49 (May, 1944), 500.

8. Biographical notes on selected sect members appear in Appendix I.

9. For a discussion of the methodological techniques employed in this study, see Appendix II.

XUM

CHAPTER II

The Subjective Meanings of History

Unlike most formal social groups, the Church of the Cosmic Liberty has no real history. That is, none of the members was concerned enough to preserve the history of the group in chronological form. Even the history of its predominant ideas was lost, not to mention a clear account of events which contributed to the formation of specific ideas.

Yet, the conspicuous lack of historical perspective allows the members to invent or improvise (which is not to say falsify) a history, albeit fragmented and one-dimensional, that "makes sense" in terms of their present situation. The subjective quality of this history defines an aspect of the sect's ethos and personifies its improvisational character. The hippie myth is alive and well: For the members of the sect, everything that is not happening now happened in the past, and since it happened in the past, it is not directly relevant, but is taken for granted. As one member (Sheryl) said when I asked her about how the Church of the Cosmic Liberty came into being:

> Oh, I don't really know. It's hard to say. Um . . . I guess you could say that it just happened. We, un, Shivadas, Fred and Peaches, and, um . . . well, some other people, I don't think you know them, well we just sort of got together . . . no, we were already together in a way. That's it, we were dealing [marijuana] and things were bad, I mean we lost a lot of bread and I got busted several times, and Alice got busted, and Tom just disappeared, and some people who were bringing the stuff up from Mexico got busted, um, and a heavy

> number was coming down, and we were really paranoid and we were sure something heavy was going on. I mean, it doesn't really matter, does it?
>
> God was trying to tell us something . . . um, dealing doesn't make it, is what He was trying to tell us, but we were so ignorant, I mean, so involved in the dealing game, that He couldn't get through directly. So, we just started the Church, kind of like . . . um, we just started the Church . . . the Chu[illegible] just kind of happened, that's all.

The Church of the Cosmic Liberty, then, was born in the midst of a crisis that threatened to put several persons who were close to one another behind bars. This group of around ten people, plus a number of outside "contacts," had been dealing marijuana in the area for around a year. Their customers, of course, were also hippies, but the police had managed to infiltrate the group with informers, and were "ripping off" the members of the group one by one. Several houses were being rented as "crash pads" by the dealing group, and as the police became aware of one, the group would move into another.

> It was really scary. The narcs were following us everywhere and they knew what we were doing. It was like we didn't care. You know, it was a big game for us to see how much we could get away with before the bust to end all busts came down. This one friend of ours who had to go to the police station for something told us that he saw a model of the neighborhood, you know, with little blocks of wood to represent the houses and everything. On one of the houses, Shivadas' house to be exact, there was a little flag. So, when we found out about this, we split up. I had to stay here, though, because my probation officer wouldn't let me split, but everybody else just sort of vanished. They lived with different people and moved from house to house and were sort of on the move all the time.

The apparent upshot of this forced evacuation was an attempt on the part of the hippie dealing group to re-evaluate its purpose. The

XUM

penetration of the police into the group's activities threatened its solidarity only minimally, but everyone agreed to a change in tactics. A way had to be found to protect the group, and to permit it to continue dealing. Rosemarie said:

> We were already into religion, but in a very limited way. I mean we had been going to see different people in the area who were talking about how they had found God. And we were reading about Ramakrishna at this time, and He was working on us, although we didn't really understand how this was coming down. I guess we started the Church when we figured that the cops were going to come crashing through the door at any minute. So we sort of had this thing going, that if the cops came in we couldn't be busted because it was part of our religious practices. I mean we used marijuana as a sacrament.

Religion had a utilitarian aspect, then, from the very beginnings of the sect. The intention of the people in founding a "church" was to protect their dealing activities and to provide the basis for overturning the anti-marijuana statutes on religious grounds. But beyond the pragmatic was an underlying conviction that the "hand of the Divine" was making itself felt. On another occasion, the same subject quoted above informed me that:

> We felt that we had done everything that we could possibly do. We thought and thought about what was happening and we had the realization that without God's help we were all through. This realization, you might say, was the real thing. We had it sort of all at once. Everybody was split up, but we came together and said, 'Wow, this thing is happening to us, and what does it mean?' And we sort of looked at each other and knew that it was very heavy. I mean, it was real. God was with us. He was everywhere. It all had a purpose.

This realization charged the group with new-found courage and a renewed sense of solidarity. Their lives had something in common that extended beyond friendship and business. Most of the individuals in the original group had seen themselves as part of an "extended family" of hip, beautiful people. They had been together, more or less, for several years. Some had come from Berkeley together, others joined the group in Los Angeles. Each has a specialized way of describing the group's early formation, but all speak of this in glowing terms which suggests a mythical immanence at work. One member of the "Church" (Shivadas) described his first encounter in 1967 with a woman (Alice) who is at present only minimally involved in the sect, although she was at one time a core figure:

> It was late at night and I was out on the pier smoking a number and trying to figure out how we could make it happen. Some of our contacts had just been busted and it looked like it was all over. Then I saw her walking on the other side of the pier. She stopped and looked at me and we walked toward each other, and we knew that it was happening. She later told me that she knew she would meet the people who would make her life worthwhile. That was the way it was. We just came together on the pier and in an instant were old friends. She had some grass to sell, and we had plenty of customers but no grass. Things just clicked very nicely, but it was personal and beautiful, not just a business thing. It was very heavy, I mean, spiritually. I took her home and introduced her to Peaches, and all of a sudden the family was back together. Everybody came together. She introduced us to some very nice people and we all decided that this was where it was at. This was before the Church started, but it was all pointed in that direction, and we had a pre-vision of how it was going to be.

In attempting to capture the mood of the group of people who founded the Cosmic Liberty Church, it is appropriate to mention another event that conditioned their religious response to the threat posed by the police. The hip community in the area was also going through changes on a large scale. Due to the war in Southeast Asia, many young people were becoming politicized and were turning in their flowers for picket signs, and in some cases, bricks and molotov cocktails. A clear division between the "politicos" and the apolitical hippies was evident not only in the form of occasional confrontations that took place on the streets and in the hip business establishments, but the rhetoric of the youth culture was becoming less tolerant of the "hang loose ethic" and increasingly vocal about "revolution." One member of the sect (Brother Dick) told me:

> We were turned off by all the fucking violence. And we didn't want the police hassling us. This was what it was coming to. The police were pretty much looking the other way until the demonstrations started. Then they would stop people on the streets and bust them for anything at all . . . like jay walking or loitering. I mean this is a sort of resort town. People in resort towns are supposed to loiter, but once the political bullshit started, the cops got very up-tight. I went to demonstrations myself, until rocks started flying. Then I knew it was just a shuck. You can't have a revolution by throwing rocks. Revolution comes from within.

While this does not constitute empirical evidence that would suggest a split between political and hippie youth, it does suggest that for the members of the group that later founded the sect, such a notion had a special meaning. To them it meant that the community in which they lived was no longer a safe place. Not only could they not deal marijuana with impunity, but they could not even feel free to come and go on the streets as they pleased. A casual trip to the beach or to the store or to a friend's house was no longer a casual event, but was something that was underscored by the possibility of harrassment or arrest. As if to underscore this sense of danger, one of the members of the group (Tom) was arrested while standing on a street corner one evening in early 1967. The account of his "bust" was offered to me by Sheryl:

XUM

> He was just standing there and this squad car pulled up and the cops just got out and grabbed him. He said, 'Wait a minute,' or something like that, so they said he was resisting arrest, and they slugged him a few times and threw him in the back of the car. When they got him to the station they searched him and found ten lids on him. He got off for illegal search and seizure, but he couldn't deal any more because they watched him all the time. He did anyway, though, and that's how he later got busted on possession charges. Obviously, he shouldn't have been out at night in the first place because he knew the cops were getting pretty outrageous. In fact, we told him to cool it, told him that things weren't the same anymore with the cops and everything, but he wouldn't listen. That's him, he won't listen to anyone.

Another member of the group was arrested in an alley as he got out of a car that belonged to a present core member of the sect. The police confiscated the car, several ounces of hashish, a "spoon" of cocaine, some LSD capsules, and a pound of marijuana.

> He really blew it. He saw the policeman coming, so he tried to stash the dope. It was in a brown paper bag, and they saw him stick it under the seat. I mean he got out of the car to come into my house, then he turned around and jumped back in the car. The cops really had him. And they had my car! They didn't call me or try to bust me, though. They went to my P.O. [parole officer] and told him about the spoon of coke. That coke really put them up-tight. Oh, yeah, he got off . . . illegal search and seizure; but they kept the car for two months. I was afraid to go and get it, but I finally did when the heat was off. And my P.O. was pissed off, too! But he couldn't do anything about it. I loan my car to a lot of people. How do I know what they're doing? [laughs]

Far from breaking up the group, the arrests contributed to the members' desires to re-establish themselves as a more formidable collectivity. This suggests that the autonomy of the individuals, though threatened, remained more or less in tact. Most defined themselves as "hippies" or "beat people" and were inalterably opposed to taking a job in the "straight world." Besides this they were leaders of sorts in their own

XUM

community, and played minor "super-star" roles. Many of the younger people in the hippie scene looked up to them because not only were they dealing in "super-grass" (which suggested to everyone that their connections were better and they were in general "more together as people" to have such connections), but because of their experience, they served as repositories of the hip culture. So involved had they become in dealing and in the hippie culture in general that the question of quitting dealing and engaging in less dangerous activities never occurred to them, or if such a question did arise, it was subsumed under the rubric of a kind of "false consciousness" which lingered threateningly in the background and occasionally surfaced to remind everyone of his own middle-class origins.

> Quit dealing? Why didn't we just quit? Man, you don't understand. We didn't want to. No. Not only didn't we want to, we couldn't. I mean we had everything to lose by quitting. Our friends, our incomes, and most of all, our self-respect. Oh, sometimes we thought about it, but then something would happen--such as a new shipment would come in or a cat would want us to get him a brick or something--and it would start all over again. We were dealers. You dig? Dealers. That was what and who we were. Dope was our thing. We played with dope, talked about dope, smoked enormous amounts of dope, and sold dope and gave away dope, and turned people onto dope. Come to think of it, we were on a colossal ego-trip, but at the time it was the only thing we were into. No, we never thought about quitting, even when our people were getting busted.

My own initial contact with the members of the Cosmic Liberty Church occurred in 1967 when I was in the area gathering data for my master's thesis project on marijuana dealers.[1] I happened to meet several members of the group who told me of their efforts to legalize marijuana and other psychedelic drugs for use as legal religious sacraments. This intrigued me, so I asked for and received permission to meet the rest of the group. This was before the sect was actually a formal religious group, but I was nevertheless quite interested in the fact that drugs and the use thereof had been elevated to the level of the sacred. I can recall one member's description of marijuana:

> This is a holy plant. It makes you aware. Not just in an ordinary sense, either, but in a spiritual way. The Hindus know this. The Muslims know this. Even the U.S. government knows this. You see, it [marijuana] has come down through the ages to provide those who use it with an insight into all the bullshit that goes on in the world. That's why it's illegal. If everyone knew about this bullshit, then nobody would play along with societies' stupid games.

Another member had improvised a "brown-bread theory of history" which went something like this:

> In every early civilization the people used a kind of bread that had a special mold on it that caused hallucinations. Jesus Christ himself was into this bread, as were those saints and sages who came before him. In the middle ages this bread was well known. Finally, it [the mold] was synthesized as LSD-25. God brought about this synthesis as a kind of antidote to the atom bomb, which was discovered at about the same time.

The point is that the founders of the Cosmic Liberty Church had come to see all psychedelic drugs, particularly marijuana, as a link to the Divine, and themselves, as dispensers of these drugs, as sacred emmisaries whom God had instructed to "turn on" the world. He had apparently fore-warned them that martyrdom was useless, however, because in spite of their definition of dealing as sacred duty, the group carried it out in as clandestine a fashion as possible. But, one of the now-departed charismatic members of the group who did choose to martyr himself as a purveyor of the divine grass, found himself abandoned. In speaking of his arrest, a member said:

> He asked for it. He was on the radio talking about how stoned he was and how grass was holy and the hippies were the new wave of a religious revival that would overthrow the government. When he got outside of the station the cops were waiting for him. And in the court he told the judge that he wouldn't stop smoking dope because it was his belief that God wanted him to smoke it. So the judge stuck him in the can without possibility of bail, and there he was. He wanted us to have ourselves busted, too. He thought that God wanted this! It was really a drag because we loved him, but he was really full of shit, and everybody, including the judge, knew it. I went down and testified in his behalf, but it didn't do any good. He wouldn't shut up.

Because he was well-liked, the role that the above member played in the dealing group was a vital one, and his arrest and disappearance from the scene proved to be a turning point in the pre-history of the Cosmic Liberty Church. Before the event took place, the idea of the sect as a bulwark against legal retribution was not fully articulated. Everyone apparently had a notion about how to safeguard the group's activities, but no specific plans for instituting an organization were developed. After the arrest of this core member, however, and the "bad vibes" that were attendent upon it, the ideas for founding a new religion were given a new priority. An important consideration was that prior to the arrest, the members of the group felt that adequate protection came in the form of a reserve of money that could be used as an emergency bail fund and for hiring a "dope lawyer" who could get any dealing or possession charges either reduced to misdemeanors or thrown out of court altogether. When he was busted, however, the member had asked the group for more than this: As a consequence, the group withdrew from the arena of legal combat and settled for a re-examination of motives and purposes. Peaches said:

XUM

> While he (the above member-dealer who martyred himself) was in the joint, we all got together to talk about what was happening. Obviously, something was wrong. Not just with the laws--sure, they were totally screwed--but something was wrong with the way we were doing things. We were going about this in the wrong way. We all looked deep within ourselves and came to the same conclusion . . . God had delivered this final warning. We either had to straighten out or end up in the joint. It made us feel terrible that we couldn't help him. I mean, there he was, in jail, with no way of getting out. And he was saying to us, "You're my friends, and you got me into this; now put up or shut up."

Perhaps in recognition of their own lack of resources which prohibited confrontation with the legal machinery of the state, the members of the dealing group resorted to their only alternative, which was to redefine the group and direct its energies within, rather than without, in hopes of re-establishing their dissolving spirit. A moral question arose which was not only that of the order which threatened to break up their dealing activities, but that which was called into question when their associate--one of the original "beautiful people"--asked for but did not receive their support. Faced with the problem of having "copped-out" on a grand scale, the group decided that the time was right for the formal founding of the Cosmic Liberty Church.

The "church" they felt, would straighten everything out. For several months in late 1967, the remaining members of the original dealing group devoted themselves to the writing of a "church charter." And, they rented space in an office building, continued to read religious literature from a variety of sources, exhorted the local hippie community to "turn to God," and otherwise took their first halting steps in the direction of organizing a religious sect. Moreover, several of the mem-

XUM

bers of the founding group were "initiated" into the practice of yoga by the International Meditation Society, of whom the Indian mystic, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is the head, and these same members began to cultivate a number of spiritualists, mediums, and various other non-orthodox religionists and their followers whom they contacted in the area. Several newspaper articles on the newly founded "church" appeared in the underground press which brought a few people to the group. Other hippies began drifting in when they heard, usually by word of mouth, about the new religion that approved of drug use. Again, the purpose of the Cosm[illegible] was to provide its members with a way to get a[illegible] it was spoken of by the members in terms [illegible] moral basis for such a movement was alr[illegible]ioned core member was arrested and the [illegible]nything about it. In 1968 the followi[illegible] form of a pamphlet, complete with an [illegible]

> In answer to [illegible]eceived . . . Yes! There is a God. [illegible]ch is dedicated to helping its members get [illegible]ally, intimately, beyond doubt.
>
> The Cosmic Liberty Church became an official tax-exempt religious organization on Valentine's Day, 1968, when we received our charter from the State of California. Since then we have been holding services in members' homes and teaching spiritual practices in our office.
>
> The Church of the Cosmic Liberty is so named because the Cosmic Liberty is the right of every person to work out his own individual relationship with God. The famous Holy Man Swami Vivekananda said,

> 'I pray that the sects may multiply until there are as many sects as there are people.' It is exactly this that we stress . . . individualized religion. Every single person on earth can experience God.
>
> 'If a man will take one step toward Allah, Allah will take a hundred steps toward him,' says a Moslem proverb. We've found it to be true. The Church of the Cosmic Liberty is an effort to help each of its members take his or her own steps into harmony with the invisible order behind life. We teach specific methods such as meditation, but our effort is to get away from policies and rules.
>
> Every human who ever breathed was impelled by some inner force to seek truly lasting happiness. It is this motive which drives the priest in his prayers and the gypsy in his wanderings. The force of God within us is the meaning in the experience of man. The longing for God is the highest of human motives. Until we have made this profound drive the center of our lives, we ache intolerably, even beneath our brief moments of pleasure. How best to do this is what we are working out, together, yet each in his own way at the Cosmic Liberty Church.

Between the lines of this pamphlet are the contingencies, both moral and social, which precipitated the actual founding of the Cosmic Liberty Church. The dealing group from which the sect first evolved had clearly decided to straddle the line between the "hip" and "straight" worlds. Individualized religion, reference to the highest of human motives, tax-exemption, and the like, were undoubtedly designed to appeal to the respectable straight world and give the church legitimacy. In effect, the pamphlet says, "We are for real and this is honest-to-God religion." On the other hand, the references to the modern Indian saint and to Allah, mention of the lack of policies and rules, and the invocation of the "invisible order" that governs all life are intended to attract hippies and other members of the youth culture. In the charter, bers of the founding group were "initiated" into the practice of yoga by the International Meditation Society, of whom the Indian mystic, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is the head, and these same members began to cultivate a number of spiritualists, mediums, and various other non-orthodox religionists and their followers whom they contacted in the area. Several newspaper articles on the newly founded "church" appeared in the underground press which brought a few people to the group. Other hippies began drifting in when they heard, usually by word of mouth, about the new religion that approved of drug use. Again, the purpose of the Cosmic Liberty Church was to provide its members with a way to get and stay high legally, and it was spoken of by the members in terms of a mass movement. But the moral basis for such a movement was already eroded when the aforementioned core member was arrested and the group was hard-pressed to do anything about it. In 1968 the following statement was printed in the form of a pamphlet, complete with an emblazoned "Om" on the cover.

> In answer to the many inquiries we have received . . . Yes! There is a God. The Cosmic Liberty Church is dedicated to helping its members get to know that God personally, intimately, beyond doubt.
>
> The Cosmic Liberty Church became an official tax-exempt religious organization on Valentine's Day, 1968, when we received our charter from the State of California. Since then we have been holding services in members' homes and teaching spiritual practices in our office.
>
> The Church of the Cosmic Liberty is so named because the Cosmic Liberty is the right of every person to work out his own individual relationship with God. The famous Holy Man Swami Vivekananda said,

> 'I pray that the sects may multiply until there are as many sects as there are people.' It is exactly this that we stress . . . individualized religion. Every single person on earth can experience God.
>
> 'If a man will take one step toward Allah, Allah will take a hundred steps toward him,' says a Moslem proverb. We've found it to be true. The Church of the Cosmic Liberty is an effort to help each of its members take his or her own steps into harmony with the invisible order behind life. We teach specific methods such as meditation, but our effort is to get away from policies and rules.
>
> Every human who ever breathed was impelled by some inner force to seek truly lasting happiness. It is this motive which drives the priest in his prayers and the gypsy in his wanderings. The force of God within us is the meaning in the experience of man. The longing for God is the highest of human motives. Until we have made this profound drive the center of our lives, we ache intolerably, even beneath our brief moments of pleasure. How best to do this is what we are working out, together, yet each in his own way at the Cosmic Liberty Church.

Between the lines of this pamphlet are the contingencies, both moral and social, which precipitated the actual founding of the Cosmic Liberty Church. The dealing group from which the sect first evolved had clearly decided to straddle the line between the "hip" and "straight" worlds. Individualized religion, reference to the highest of human motives, tax-exemption, and the like, were undoubtedly designed to appeal to the respectable straight world and give the church legitimacy. In effect, the pamphlet says, "We are for real and this is honest-to-God religion." On the other hand, the references to the modern Indian saint and to Allah, mention of the lack of policies and rules, and the invocation of the "invisible order" that governs all life are intended to attract hippies and other members of the youth culture. In the charter,

XUM

which I examined, reference is made to the use of "sacraments"; and, the "Cosmic Liberty" is extensively elaborated so that the document clearly allows for any means that the individual finds necessary to find God and to "make this profound drive the center of his life."

The dealing group had begun by this time (the distribution of the pamphlet) to define itself as a sect, that is, as a social entity separated from the rest of society. Weber has given us the following definition of a sect:

> A 'sect' in the sociological sense of the word is an exclusive association of religious virtuosos or of especially qualified religious persons, recruited through individual admission after establishment of qualification. By contrast, a "church," as a universalistic establishment for the salvation of the masses raises the claim, like the "state," that everyone, at least each child of a member, must belong by birth. It demands sacramental acts and, possibly, proof of acquaintance with its holy learning as a precondition of its membership rights, but establishes as a duty the observance of the sacraments and the discharge of those obligations which are a condition of active membership rights. The consequence of this is that when the church reaches its full development and has power, it coerces opponents to conform according to the principle coge intrare. The individual is normally "born" into the church, single conversions and admissions occurring only until the time the church has attained its principal goal--the unification of all men in the universal church. (Hinduism has some of the properties of the church conjoined to sect-like exclusiveness.)[2]

Their self-conception is important in that it all but precluded the possibility that the Church of the Cosmic Liberty would have any mass appeal to youth in the area. And, since the members had chosen to confront a moral rather than a structural (in this case, legal) problem, the question of membership recruitment on the outside, and still less of "turning on the world to God and dope," was resolved beforehand: Everybody was allowed (enjoined) to "do his own thing," with or without actually paying lip service to the divine.

This being the case, why did the members make the effort to organize a "bonafide" religious sect? The answer to this can be found in one of the member's statements about these early days of the sect:

> Well, it started because we had to actually admit to ourselves that we were ready to devote ourselves to God. We had been through a whole lot and had all individually resolved this, but as a group it wasn't settled. (X's) bust more or less got us to think about this. We wanted to help him get out of jail, so we decided to hurry up and get the charter thing settled [Articles of Incorporation] so he would have grounds for saying that the dope thing was part of his religion. But, we were mostly trying to deal with this ourselves, making ourselves realize that this was it, that we were going to dedicate our lives to God.

The process of working on the charter for the "church," together with the awakening sense of the infusion of the divine in every event and circumstance that befell the group, helped to codify the purpose of a new, exclusive, meditation-based religious sect that would give all of the members a new lease on life.

The "new lease," however, did not mean that the members of the dealing group cum religious sect found it necessary to proselytize the Cosmic Liberty. When the core member was arrested, this convinced the rest of the group that it would be better for all concerned to avoid public proclamations about the sacred value of drugs. (Another factor that may have contributed to this view was the legal problems faced by Timothy Leary, whose League for Spiritual Discovery was the forerunner of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty.) And, the arrest of the core member

XUM

convinced them that they were not really in a position to deal effectively with the legal system, so the best approach was to "lay back" and deal marijuana, while taking in new people as they happened to come into contact with the group.

> We figured that if God wanted people to join us, He would put them onto us. It was just an ego trip to assume that we would have to do His work for Him.

The dynamics of the original founding group itself thus prohibited the Cosmic Liberty Church from acquiring the character of a "social movement" or in Weber's sense, of a "universalistic church." The people felt a profound sense of interpersonal solidarity, which was in all probability a continuation of the elitest, secretive Weltanchauug that first emerged as a result of their experiences as dealers. Because of the legal problems associated with dealing, the dealing group, although it saw itself as an important segment of the hippie movement, was a secret society. The nature of this society was that to the exclusion of everyone else, the members saw themselves as a solidary unit struggling for survival in a hostile, threatening world.

The early days of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty were characterized by a reawakening or rediscovery of the group solidarity that had been developed during the time of group dealing. This rediscovery enabled the members to redefine the hippie myth that they felt had been jeopardized both by the politicization of some Venice hippies and by their own experiences with the local police. While the members engaged in dealing activities with a new (religious) zeal, they began to associate more and more with the heterodox religionists of varying persuasions and to collect the accoutrements of the religious life. They preserved certain things from their previous life style, particularly the elements of elitism (secret society membership) and the paramount concern for the search for self--in addition to styles of speech, dress, and demeanor--that combine to give social life a decidedly hip valence, and moved into the religious orbit. They began meditating regularly, sometimes with and sometimes without the aid of marijuana, and they searched esoteric religious literature for practices that would complement their life style, and, in the words of Peaches, "make it zippy."

Finding in Hinduism the abiding issue of the transformation of Self, an issue which was a clear parallel to their own attempts to give themselves a new attitude and frame of mind through the sacramental (or perhaps even recreational) use of drugs, the founding members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty saw for themselves the possibility of creating a religious sect that was both hip and Hindu. As Heinrich Zimmer says in Philosophies of India:

> The chief aim of Indian thought is to unveil and integrate into consciousness what has been . . . resisted and hidden by the forces of life--not to explore and describe the visible world. The supreme and characteristic achievement of the Brahman mind (and this has been decisive, not only for the course of Indian philosophy, but also for the history of Indian civilization) was its discovery of the Self (atman) as an independent, imperishable entity, underlying the conscious personality and ~~bo~~dily frame. Everything that we normally know and express about ourselves belongs to the sphere of change, the sphere of time and space, but this Self (atman) is forever changeless, beyond time, beyond space and the veiling net of casuality, beyond measure, beyond the dominion of the eye. The

XUM

> effort of Indian philosophy has been, for millenniums, to know this adamantine Self and make the knowledge effective in human life . . . Through the vicissitudes of physical change a spiritual footing is maintained in the peaceful-blissful ground of Atman; eternal, timeless, and imperishable Being.[3]

Not that the group gave up marijuana dealing and use when the group embraced Hinduism. On the contrary, the new sense of purpose they had arrived at gave them an additional impetus to engage in both activities, for not only were they "Hip dealers," and "heads," they were now "emissaries of the Divine." As a member once told me:

> Dealing for me was an act of self-purification. Once I was dealing for the Church, it became clear that everything was in God's hands. I knew I wouldn't be busted, or burned either, for that matter. It was righteous. We began meeting more and more beautiful people who could dig on what we were about. For myself, as I said, dealing cleaned out the last traces of my past. I was God's child, not the child of my fucked-up parents.

Although this idea of dealing as a kind of self-purification is not widely shared by the other members of the original founding group, it serves as an illustration of the sense of purpose with which the founders were infused. Because of the police threat, and to a lesser extent because of the changes that the hippie community was going through due to its partial politicization, dealing had lost some of its original romance. It was apparent to the dealing group that the legal restrictions against marijuana and the widespread social disapproval of the hippies had a distinctly moral quality. Having already aligned themselves with a new moral order of their own creation, dealing and drug use came to be redefined as a kind of sacred activity, and the newly organized sect was to be the means by which that activity could be implemented. Another member I talked to when I first encountered the sect spoke about the purpose of founding the Church of the Cosmic Liberty:

> We really wanted to get past all of the bullshit that you find in ordinary religion. I mean, dope is what the hippie thing is about. The people were into dope, so why not take it to its logical conclusion? Dope was the new morality. We were all high. In its pure form, religion is high, too. We were just helping things along. If we had a religion which allowed everyone to get high, then the busts would stop.

All of this suggests that the Cosmic Liberty Church had its origins in social and psychological crises. Indeed, the problem the members had with the police and with their own perceived powerlessness contributed to the overall stance they took in deciding to organize a sect. However, this does not tell the whole story, for it suggests a kind of negative reaction that outweighs the positive mode in which their social situation was apparently cast. That is, the life that the members were leading in common, in spite of its legal and social shortcomings, was sufficient enough cause to provide them with the desire to stay together "no matter what." In a sense, dealing was an exciting and fun business. It involved much of their time and brought them into contact with a wide variety of interesting people who gave them encouragement and provided their days with much comic and social relief. The forming of the sect was simply another move in this direction, for not only could they then legitimately partake of the religious teachings of many saints, sages, seers, or more ordinary preachers and teachers, but it gave them something new and exciting to do, albeit in a similar manner in which they

XUM

did things in the past.

The subjective meanings of the history of the Cosmic Liberty Church are to be found in these two apparently contradictory themes. The sect was founded because of trouble that the original members encountered, and it grew out of a "joyous revelation" that "God was present everywhere."

The revelation of which the members speak may have reflected merely their own lack of perspective and a sense of anomie. Or, it might be defined as a kind of "cosmic cop-out" on their friend who was arrested. When the members found that they could not cope with the outer world, they improvised an inner one which was less threatening and which they could more or less manipulate at will. On the other hand, however, the emergence of the Cosmic Liberty Church might be attributable to the limited alternatives among which the members had to make a rational choice. Both of these statements are plausible, for it is clear that while the events of the day were encroaching on a group of dealers, they improvised a reality of their own which was designed to enable them to continue on as before, except that a new meaning was attached to their previous life style. And, the alternatives available to the dealers were but two; either to quit dealing or redefine the activity. In the end, the members of the Cosmic Liberty Church were able, at least in this case, to have their cake and to eat it too, for as I will demonstrate, the new sacred definition of dealing later allowed the members to give it up altogether. The point that should not be underemphasized,

XUM

I think, is that the members of the Cosmic Liberty Church have varying perspectives on their history, but these perspectives gave the sect its original social direction and gave innovative social behavior a central place in its organizational scheme. The group could not align itself with the entire youth movement, but on the other hand, it could not reject the hippie movement out of hand. Thus, the decision was arrived at to continue in the tradition of the hip ethic and give that ethic a religious meaning. It was in this manner that the group became inner-directed and the people were thus able to adjust to the social fact of their alienation from society and thus legitimate it in a religious context.

In summary, each member of the original founding group of eight or so people brought to the sect his own ideas about why the new life style was needed, what it would provide for the members, who it was ultimately for, and on what basis it would be organized. For some, the sect came about as a result of the moral collapse of the hippie movement of which they were a part. For others, a personal re-evaluation of their own situation brought the idea of a new life style into view. While the members for the most part wanted to provide a religious foundation for a social movement, this was not given a great deal of priority. Instead, the group turned itself inward and effected a partial rejection of the world. Because of the emphasis on personal authenticity and individuality, and the lack of emphasis on "history" a built-in improvisational character guided the early stages of sect organization and was

XUM

preserved for the times to come. Everybody attempted to "do his own thing," which meant that individuals instituted practices on their own which others came to follow.

An Historical Overview

1968 was the year in which the members of the original founding group began the task of organizing a religious life style. Some publicity was given the sect in the local underground press. Although this did not bring many new members, the effect of the publicity was to help channel some of the energies of the people in the direction of finding new members. New people were recruited from the neighborhood, contact was established with the Vedanta Society in Hollywood, and a regular religious schedule of rituals and formal "church" activities was instituted. Moreover, a number of middle-class adults were recruited. These people gave donations to the church and attended sect functions on an irregular basis. Toward the end of the year, several members of the inner circle of the sect underwent formal initiation in Bhakti yoga and accepted a Swami of the Ramakrishna Order of India (and Vedanta Society) as their "spiritual teacher" or "guru." By the end of 1968 the sect members referred to themselves as devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, a 19th Century Bengali "avatar," or incarnation of God.

In 1969 dealing of drugs continued but the importance of this activity was on the decline due to the donations of the middle-class "devotees" and to the members' increasing preoccupation with religion.

XUM

In particular, the members of the inner circle were becoming more involved in their daily religious practices--meditation and _japa_, the latter being a form of worship which involves the silent repeating of a _mantra_ (name of God). Finally, after the birth of several children, dealing stopped altogether. The people who were still dealing when the children were born decided to make a pact with God; they would quit dealing if "the Lord" would provide them with an income. Although they continued to use marijuana, religious life in the sect was becoming increasingly strict. Daily use of marijuana and celibacy and other austerities were instituted on a more or less voluntary and irregular basis for those who felt they were ready for them.* In this year the office that the sect had maintained was abandoned because not only was there not enough money to support it, but the members' interest in holding public "services and instruction" had all but disappeared. After much soul searching, the several members with children decided to accept public Aid to Dependent Children as an alternative to dealing. A few new members joined the group and several left.

By 1970 the sect defined itself as a Vedantist "church" (although the Vedanta Society did not formally recognize the Church of the Cosmic Liberty as a sovereign religious organization), and the members maintained almost daily contact with the head swami, a venerable Hindu monastic, whom they designated their spiritual teacher or guru. Most of the inner circle members underwent or hoped to undergo initiation by their guru into _Bhakti_ (pietistic or devotional) yoga. In granting authority him over the spiritual aspects of their lives, they forfeited their right to "do their own thing" in pursuit of religious goals. Moreover, with initiation came numerous new religious practices and beliefs which were instituted and ideologically reinforced. These included days of fasting and silence, days of feasting, days of prayer, periods of celibacy, and of course Vedantic theory in general and Ramakrishna's theology in particular. The Cosmic Libertarians (as devotees of Ramakrishna and followers of the Vedantic Swami) also made occasional trips to Vedanta's convent in Santa Barbara where they received additional instructions from their guru and learned about the benefits of the religious life from the people there. Finally, the birth of still another child (whose parents had joined the group in late 1969) put a strain on finances, so in an attempt to bolster the sect's coffers, posters and incense were imported from India. These were then sold to the Vedanta Society's bookstore and to various hippie shops in the area surrounding the Cosmic Liberty Church, the profits being used to support needy members and their children as well as to pay for various sect enterprises such as ritual feasts, past due phone bills from the days of the office, and so on.

---

* Shivadas, one of the founders, told me that he considers marijuana use to be a kind of austerity.

Whereas daily life prior to 1970 was characterized in part by preoccupation with and involvement in the technologies and instrumentalities of drug dealing, by 1970 and even moreso in 1971, daily life featured the members' collective and individual embracing of a routine of meditation,

XUM

japa (repeating the name of God) and studying the Hindu scriptures. When in 1971 the guru learned that the Cosmic Libertarians used marijuana, he gave them the choice of giving up the prospect of salvation or giving up drugs. That the group chose salvation testifies not only to the salience of their guru's word, but to their having defined the drug experience (i.e. getting high) as the nominal equivalent of the mystical experience that resulted from meditation and other ritual practices. Nearly half of the group, for whom marijuana perhaps was their religion, left the sect rather than give up drug use, so the size of the Cosmic Liberty Church was reduced from around forty to fewer than twenty members. Thus, not only was the original idea of the Cosmic Liberty compromised at this stage in the sect's evolution, but the original (plus, primary and authentic) means of sustaining the group had been completely eroded. Several members of the sect who had, prior to this time, relied on donations and gifts from others as their means of sustenance found part-time jobs, but even so, the celibacy, days of silence and fasting, ritual feasts after Sunday services, and other religious observances continued to occupy the remaining core members. The role of children by this time became a major concern. The importation of Indian goods continued, but the previously entertained ideas about opening a "Church store" were all but abandoned.[4]

Footnotes to Chapter II

1. Joseph Damrell, "The Dealer" (Master's Thesis, University of California, Davis, 1968).

2. Max Weber (trans. and ed. by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale), The Religion of India (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958), p. 6.

3. Heinrich Zimmer (ed. by Joseph Campbell), The Philosophies of India (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), pp. 3-4.

4. Thomas Robbins, in his article, "Eastern Mysticism and the Resocialization of Drug Users: The Maher Baba Cult," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 3: (Fall, 1969) 308-317, describes the way in which mysticism facilitates the resocialization of drug users into conventional society. Seeing the Maher Baba Cult as a "half-way house," Robbins argues that yoga and meditation are used by hippies trying to give up drugs. However, the changes in orientation of Robbins' subjects were much more abrupt than the changes that the Cosmic Libertarians underwent. And, as I have said, the Cosmic Libertarians had no intention of giving up drugs when they embraced Hinduism. It is likely, however, that the "high" they obtained from Hindu religious practices was gradually defined as superior to the "high" they obtained from smoking marijuana, so they were willing to discontinue its use when their guru found out about it. Still, I would argue that the structure and organization of the sect did not contribute to the "resocialization" of the Cosmic Libertarians into the dominant society; instead, as I will demonstrate, the sect enabled them to define themselves as more or less permanent members of the marginal culture of youth.

CHAPTER III

Social Organization and Social Structure

The Inner and Outer Circles

The members of the sect divide themselves into two main groups; the inner circle and the outer circle. The inner circle consists of eight or so "households" of two or more people -- husband and wife with child, husband and wife without a child, and woman with child -- while the outer circle is a general category that consists of members -- most of them from the adult, middle class -- who come to "services" on Sundays but who are not in face to face contact with the inner circle membership during the rest of the week.* Thus, the inner circle members are so defined because they are in constant contact with the directors and other devotees, they have undergone formal initiation into Vedantic yoga (_Bhakti_, or yoga of piety and devotion), they live within walking or easy driving distance of the "church" (which is, again, located in Shivadas' and Peaches' flat), and/or because they are simply well-liked by Fred or Shivadas. Outer circle members, on

---

*See Appendix I for sample biographies of some inner and outer circle members.

XUM

the other hand, are relative new-comers to the religion game in most cases, or, if they are not, then they are still employed in "straight" jobs, or are otherwise occupied in such a way that their presence at the site of sect goings on is usually limited to the Sunday Services and occasional mid-weekly visits. And, usually, the members of the outer circle do not engage in sustained interaction with anyone other than the directors.

Occasionally it happens that a new-comer whom a member of the inner or outer circles has introduced to the sect is more interested in the Vedanta Society than in the Church of the Cosmic Liberty. Although he may be encouraged to partake of both, if the prospective member shows more inclination toward Vedanta, this is deemed acceptable by the directors, who then introduce the person to the appropriate people at the Vedanta Society. Such introductions are considered to be a part of the meaning of the title of "instrument of God" which the sect has bestowed upon Shivadas and Fred. (This is discussed in the section on leadership and authority which appears later in the chapter.)

In addition to the fifteen or so members of the inner circle and the thirty or so members of the outer circle, there are around twenty people whom the directors and others close to them consider to be "absentee members." These members are either former inner circle members who moved away, or else they are close friends who are only tangentially involved in religious pursuits. My observations of situations where these people have been present (and when the committed members were not around) convinced me that they are situational religionists; that is, people who espouse religious faith in the presence of the other devotees, but who, once they are alone, occupy themselves with typically secular concerns. The other members, apparently, are not unaware of this, but believe that even a little bit of religion goes a long way, and, some members even believe that some of the "absentee devotees" don't really need sustained involvement because they have attained a high level of spirituality by actions in their secular lives. Too, some of them are considered to be hippies' hippies.

Sect Economics

The members of the outer circle and a few of the absentee members of the inner circle also give money to the sect, which perhaps further explains why their more or less intermittent involvement in the religious life of the group is tolerated to the extent that it is. Since most of the inner circle of devotees have given up such "mundane" things as careers, jobs, and the like, someone must provide the funds necessary for these individuals to live and for the sect as a whole to function. To a great extent, in the sect commitment is measured by a person's not having to lift a finger for his own or his family's support, but instead to devote the better part of his time to meditation. The members of the outer circle and the few absentee members of the inner circle have come to respect this and often express the desire to live like so and so in the inner circle who "relies only on God." But not everyone is so trusting of the Divine, and their admirers can do only that which anyone would expect; namely, sweeten the coffers of the sect with occasional "donanations."

It is worth mentioning that donations are not accepted from "just anybody," because the members believe that in the giving and receiving of gifts the mysterious laws of "karma" are at work. To accept something from a person who is not elevated spiritually (i.e. a person who is on "an ego trip") can cause problems for the recipient, because it is said that the latter stands to inherit the "bad karma" of the former and that the gift thus becomes a kind of albatross that hangs around the devotee's neck. Apparently a number of "questionable" people have attempted to donate sizable quantities of money, and in at least one case, land and buildings, to the "church." Their offers were adamantly, but gently, rejected by the directors who felt that the sect was not likely to benefit in the long run by the gift. One of the directors, Fred, told me:

> Really, man, the cat offered us a church, I mean, with pews and an altar and the whole bit. But he was on an ego trip. He thought it would entitle him to some special treatment by the Lord, or by us. I mean, he can afford to do it, and I guess I was tempted, but I asked Mother [Kali] about it, and she let me know that it wasn't happening, that it wasn't a good thing. So I told him that we couldn't do it, that we were simple people trying to realize God, so we didn't really need a church. I think it blew his mind, because he gets very nervous, like, when he sees us now.

Normally a gift is accepted if the donor is a member of the outer circle, but only if certain other conditions are satisfied.[1] In particular, the members of the inner circle must see a clear need for the gift.

Then (before it is given) they meditate on it or pray for guidance from this or that diety, and, if the "vibes" are good ones, the commodity or money is accepted with the appropriate deference being paid to the donor. Sometimes the gift may be rejected "for the time being," in which case the donor is advised to try again when the time is likely to be more auspicious. Usually the reasons for rejecting an offer by a single member are vague and the other potential recipients somewhat evasive about it. However, when this occurs, it is usually because the devotees are practicing the "austerity" of "non-receipt of gifts," which is a traditional form of devotion practiced by some Hindu sadhus (holy men). Sometimes, though, gifts are refused when someone detects an attitude on the part of the donor which causes a vague feeling of discomfort to arise in an inner circle member. Such feelings become the subject of discussion, and the decision to accept or reject the gift is generally agreed upon by everyone concerned. I was present when the question arose over an absentee devotee's offer of several hundred dollars.

> Shivadas: Well, we can certainly use the bread, but . . .
>
> Peaches: But, oh, I don't know. Is this relying on the Lord?
>
> Rosemarie: Yes it is, because we didn't ask for it.
>
> Sheryl: That's right, but we have to think about what Rob wants in return.
>
> Fred: He said he didn't want anything, that he just wanted to do it because he loves us.
>
> Shivadas: That's just it. Does he love us or God? Which is the more important?

Tina: I love him, but, oh, I don't know about this.

Sarah: [She is Rob's "old lady."] Hey, you guys, I know where he's coming from, and I can dig what this is all about.

Fred: What do you mean?

Sarah: Well, I feel that you think he's sort of, well, sort of not together, and it's true, he's not. But I think the Lord wants us to help him by accepting this gift. I asked him why he offered the bread and he didn't really know. He couldn't answer.

Tom: Yeah, well, only the Lord can help him.

Sarah: Right, but through the group, you know?

Shivadas: Hmmm. Well, what do you think?

Fred: Hmmm.

Sheryl: We all love him. Shit. We should take the money. It's no big thing. We're making a big thing out of it.

Fred: For good reason; we have to be careful. You know what Swami says: "One should beware of gifts."

Sheryl: O.K. O.K. For Christ's sake, I really don't think this will hurt us.

Shivadas: I don't think so either, but it might turn out to be an obstruction. [Obstructions are things that hinder meditation.]

Tina: Why don't we ask the Lord? Are we devotees or bankers?

Shivadas: Tina, you're far out.

Sheryl: Really far out.

Fred: This is too much! Tina, you're right.*

---

* The decision was made to meditate on the question. The next day no one could come up with any "bad vibes," so the result was that the gift was accepted.

XUM

Then (before it is given) they meditate on it or pray for guidance from this or that diety, and, if the "vibes" are good ones, the commodity or money is accepted with the appropriate deference being paid to the donor. Sometimes the gift may be rejected "for the time being," in which case the donor is advised to try again when the time is likely to be more auspicious. Usually the reasons for rejecting an offer by a single member are vague and the other potential recipients somewhat evasive about it. However, when this occurs, it is usually because the devotees are practicing the "austerity" of "non-receipt of gifts," which is a traditional form of devotion practiced by some Hindu sadhus (holy men). Sometimes, though, gifts are refused when someone detects an attitude on the part of the donor which causes a vague feeling of discomfort to arise in an inner circle member. Such feelings become the subject of discussion, and the decision to accept or reject the gift is generally agreed upon by everyone concerned. I was present when the question arose over an absentee devotee's offer of several hundred dollars.

> Shivadas: Well, we can certainly use the bread, but . . .
>
> Peaches: But, oh, I don't know. Is this relying on the Lord?
>
> Rosemarie: Yes it is, because we didn't ask for it.
>
> Sheryl: That's right, but we have to think about what Rob wants in return.
>
> Fred: He said he didn't want anything, that he just wanted to do it because he loves us.
>
> Shivadas: That's just it. Does he love us or God? Which is the more important?

Tina: I love him, but, oh, I don't know about this.

Sarah: [She is Rob's "old lady."] Hey, you guys, I know where he's coming from, and I can dig what this is all about.

Fred: What do you mean?

Sarah: Well, I feel that you think he's sort of, well, sort of not together, and it's true, he's not. But I think the Lord wants us to help him by accepting this gift. I asked him why he offered the bread and he didn't really know. He couldn't answer.

Tom: Yeah, well, only the Lord can help him.

Sarah: Right, but through the group, you know?

Shivadas: Hmmm. Well, what do you think?

Fred: Hmmm.

Sheryl: We all love him. Shit. We should take the money. It's no big thing. We're making a big thing out of it.

Fred: For good reason; we have to be careful. You know what Swami says: "One should beware of gifts."

Sheryl: O.K. O.K. For Christ's sake, I really don't think this will hurt us.

Shivadas: I don't think so either [illegible] out to be an obstruction. [Obstruc[illegible] hinder meditation.]

Tina: Why don't we ask t[illegible] bankers?

Shivadas: Tina, you're far [illegible]

Sheryl: Really far out.

Fred: This is too much [illegible]

---

* The decision was made to medit[illegible] next day no one could come up with any "bad vibe[illegible] at the gift was accepted.

XUM

The outer circle and absentee members who are the potential donors are well aware of the fact that gifts are not "simply accepted" on the spur of the moment and that the person giving the gift must be in the right frame of mind in order to do so. To them, the giving of gifts (and their acceptance by the sect) is a kind of devotional act, and, as such, is considered to be of potentially great spiritual benefit when it occurs. This makes those who have something to give extremely eager to do so, and in spite of occasional reluctance on the parts of the recipients, the sect is never wanting for money, baby clothes, flowers, food, and other supplies that the members utilize in their daily lives.

Besides making the giving of a donation quite attractive, another function is served by this built-in ritual skepticism about gift-giving. Solidarity is greatly reinforced when the members are given what they need to live as they do, but in the absence of control over the giving of gifts,the members might find the boundaries that separate the outside world from the core of group life in jeopardy. Thus, while gifts are desired, their effect on the group is closely monitored, so that potential donors will not only want to give gifts, but the potential recipients can do with the gift what they have to do or want to do without much interference. And, the entire social process that emerges with the question of whether to accept or reject a donation reinforces the inner circle's notions about money and the material world (e.g. that such things are quite dangerous to the spiritual aspirant and must be treated with extreme caution).

The members do not live together, but they claim to hold some property in common. A few members early in the sect's history placed their automobiles in the sect's name. Others (in both the inner and outer circles) have made the sect the beneficiary for life insurance policies. Members in the inner circle, in addition, have an "open house policy," which is an unwritten rule saying that "what's mine is yours." This applies to food, reading materials, clothing, and the like. However, it is considered unreasonable to simply take something that belongs to another member without first receiving his or her permission to do so.

A notable exception to the quasi-communal theme is seen in the case of Fred and Verna who own a store, several vintage automobiles, a number of expensive antiques and articles of jewelry, the latter of which they make in their shop. Unlike most of the other members who are close to poverty, Fred and Verna are well off, but they do not make very many donations to the sect, nor do they give members access to their holdings. Occasionally, such as on Christmas or on other special days (e.g. birthdays or religious holidays), they give gifts to the members of the inner circle, and, once, when the sect needed money to pay for the delivery of a child in the local hospital, Fred and Verna came through with the necessary money. Still, unlike the other members of the inner circle, they have burned few economic bridges behind them in becoming committed to the religious life. This is the subject of some dissention due to the fact that the inner circle takes pride in its "voluntary poverty" and resents any displays of wealth, however religious those displays may appear to be. One member told me that she did not approve of Fred's and Verna's "stinginess":

> Well, they gave me a sheepskin rug and my kid got an Om pin that Fred made, but with all their bread they really have too much control. I mean, we can only go out to dinner when they decide that they want to go out, and then, to top it off, they decide who gets to go and who doesn't. We always are very careful about such things, because, you know, somebody could just waltz in and take over if we weren't, and there wouldn't be much point in our being devotees. But Fred and Verna get away with it, primarily because Fred has Shivadas wrapped around his little finger, on which, I might add, is sometimes a big, fat diamond. When it comes down to it, they're very stingy. Look at me. I barely get enough to eat, and I'm always broke. Do you think they'd help? Hell no. My car is in the church's name and everything. I've given everything to the church, my whole life in fact, but what have they given besides their good looks? A couple of sheepskin rugs and some rings and stuff. Beeg deel.

When I asked why they were able to get away with such "worldly behavior," I was told:

> Well, Swami really loves Fred, and, of course, there's Shivadas. They're very tight. Fred's stingy with him, too, but they're very close just the same.

All in all, life in the Church of the Cosmic Liberty is, whether by conscious design or not, rather austere. The houses, with the exception of that of Fred and Verna and the "church" itself, are rather sparsely decorated with second hand furniture and objects that have been improvised from materials purchased from local Goodwill Stores. Several members of the inner circle told me that they live on less than one thousand dollars per year, while others said they lived on two to three thousand dollars. But the members have refrained from dealing drugs for the past two and a half years (as of early 1972). Not that they made much money then, because most of it, I was told, was used to buy larger and larger supplies of marijuana, and they were "ripped off" (cheated) several times for considerable amounts of money and "dope" -- but many members occasionally complain about the lack of funds which they say they need for the "essentials" of life.

In 1969 the members of the inner circle who have children (there are seven children distributed over five households), after much soul-searching and agonizing, decided to apply for welfare (Aid to Dependent Children). This action was justified on the grounds that the children needed medical care which the sect's limited funds could not provide for, and, it was felt that the sect "deserved" welfare because leading a religious life in a "country like America" (meaning, a country that the members believe is in imminent danger of destruction) could only do good for all of the people, not just those who lead a religious life. Apparently the social workers who have members of the Cosmic Liberty Church on their caseloads more or less approve of the group's aims and do not hassle them about getting jobs.

However, some of the members of the inner circle are now (1972) employed in a variety of part-time positions. Shivadas edits "the weird books" (books on esoteric topics that range from religion to turkey farming) that are sent to a major publishing house. Peaches, his wife, babysits for several families who are not affiliated with the sect. Sheryl is working as a part-time secretary, Mike is employed part-time in a photography laboratory, Alice is a student nurse, and Rosemarie does occasional ironing and housecleaning for several of the wealthy residents in the area. All of these jobs were secured with group approval after it was determined that no harm would come to the devotees in their search for God-realization. The swami was consulted, and when he learned that no one had been working for some time, he is reported to have said:

> You are very good to have relied on God. But in the Kali Yuga [the present age which is characterized by disorder and the eventual end of the world], it is extremely difficult even for the greatest of devotees to live without working. You should try to find a job and perform your duties to your families.

Some of the members, Swami's advice notwithstanding, still adamantly refuse to get a job, since they believe that "work in the traditional sense" is dehumanizing, and, in general, a "cop-out." This view is undoubtedly a hold over from the time when, as hippies, they dropped out to pursue the "good life" and to avoid the "rat race" at any cost. At present, however, the refusal to work is justified on quasi-religious grounds. One non-working member of the inner circle said:

> Really, the world is so fucked up it is better that I don't contribute to it. Besides, it's hard to lead a spiritual life and have to deal with the squares and their worldly ego trips. Swami is right, but I'm going to try to rely on God. This is my karma that I have to work out. If it's hard on me, then so be it . . . This is part of my service to the Lord.

Still, no one in the group condones drug dealing, nor for that matter does the group any longer consider dealing to be a legitimate alternative to poverty. This is an interesting development, for, as was mentioned previously, the dealing activities that the members were originally engaged in came to be defined as a kind of devotional, or at least quasi-sacred act. Drugs were said to be the link between man and the Divine, so those who distributed these drugs (at great personal sacrifice, most were quick to point out) were by definition, holy, were "instruments of God." This, I was told, was a nice idea, but in practice, dealing was, even under the new understanding that it would bring about a special sacred dispensation, still the "same old thing." That is, "dope is dope," and dealing takes up lots of time, and, of course, not every customer believed the same thing about marijuana as did the members of the sect who dealt it. (Dealing was, in other words, a potential source of "bad karma,") When a shortage arose, the members took the opportunity to opt out of the enterprise. They believed that God had arranged this so that they could devote themselves to meditation and partake of His wisdom "directly," rather than having to elevate themselves "indirectly" through dealing. Dealing had required the participants to "trust God" (so that they would not get "busted" or "burned"), but giving up dealing required even more trust, since this meant an end to their meager financial support and the beginning of a new "life of austerity."

Many of the members of the outer circle did not know about drug dealing, or, if they did, neither approved nor disapproved of it, so the members of the inner circle had to define the end of the practice

XUM

in a different way than "giving up dealing." They did this by emphasizing a new commitment that each intended to put into practice, thus creating the basis for reliance on donations and the like for support. Shivadas commented on this:

> Well, the straight devotees really didn't know what was happening. They came just to meditate and to listen to us talk. On Sundays, we would get high and all, but not obviously; I mean, we didn't make a big thing of passing joints around, or the pipe. And when we gave it up, we were in a very joyous mood that this thing [dealing] was finally over with. Really, we were ready to rely on God for everything, and when we talked about this, a lot of people were very turned on by it, and the Lord provided us with some nice donations. He was showing us that He would keep His end of the bargain if we didn't deal dope any more. Nobody's done it since, and things are a lot more mellow around here.

With the end of dealing came a major change in the organization of daily life in the sect, because the members had voluntarily deprived themselves of an activity that had in the past taken up a great deal of time and energy. Thus, the sect became even more conscious of itself as a religious group, and new devotional practices were added to those that already existed.

Relationships Between Inner Circle Households

Relationships between households in the sect have an economic character that results from members working together in order to make enough money to live. And, a lot of borrowing of money and food from each other takes place. Some of the women pool their resources to do the laundry, since the only available machines are coin-operated. The men occasionally undertake business ventures, such as importing posters, selling goods they might make (e.g. candles, carvings, and so on), working at odd jobs, or simply "hustling" donations. When a household is running short of cash, the needy members will be invited over for dinner at another household where resources are in better order. Everyone keeps track of everyone else's resources, and people are expected to help out in the emergencies that occasionally arise. Car breakdowns, illnesses requiring medical attention, and other unexpected debts that arise thus become "everybody's problem."

These economic relationships also serve to enhance the members' commitment to the sect by providing them with an opportunity to share in activities that are believed to contribute directly to the collective welfare. Moreover, mutual projects provide a member with the opportunity to enhance his status in the eyes of another and to create bonds which can later be instrumental in the circumvention of the authority of the directors, Fred and Shivadas. This is especially the case with the women, who not only often use their getting together as a time for getting rid of any developing hostilities -- their moments alone together often take on the character of "encounter sessions" -- but also spend time figuring out the best approach to use in order to get the men to go along with some plan or other. And, when activities take members outside the parameters of sect life, new contacts are made, and sometimes potential new members or patrons are found. Finally, this is one way the members keep up on happenings in the youth culture. Bits of information from strangers and the perceptions and commentary that they evoke

XUM

later become the subject of lively discussions in the sect's headquarters and are a constant source of diversion and entertainment, as well as providing a means by which sect ideology is reinforced.

Leadership and Authority

Leadership is a touchy subject in the Cosmic Liberty Church because the members see themselves as ultra-autonomous people. Though they collectively characterize themselves as a group of the spiritual elect, each believes that his own unique participation makes the group what it is. With each marching to his own highly stylized tune, then, everyone becomes a potential leader. Thus, when asked to name who the actual leaders are, most members will pay lip service to the fact that it is either they or the Lord, which may mean Sri Ramakrishna, Jesus, Buddha, Vishnu, Shiva, the swami, Divine Mother, or any other "heavy spirit." Said one devotee:

> God governs all. He is all in all. Just resign yourself to the Lord and problems melt away. Follow the dictates of your own conscience; turn to God and cry like a child for its mother. He will answer your prayers.

However, the hustle and bustle of existence, even in the sect, tends to strip aspects of daily life of their poetic potentialities. There are things that have to get done -- things like meditating twice a day, cleaning the house, placing fresh flowers before the various shrines, taking the kids out for some fresh air, going to the post office, store, welfare office, and all the other things that seem to pile up in the course of a few waking hours. And, there are characters to mold and identities to be sought after, and, hopefully, found. So, too, there are problems to iron out and feelings to express; there are appointments to make and keep and mouths to feed; there are thoughts to ponder and dreams to interpret. The list goes on and on. But, out of this collage of the important and the trivial emerges a semblance of order, and things do have a way of getting done in spite of everything that comes up in between.

As people who constantly testify to having rejected the material world and having embraced all that is mystical, and, therefore, holy, the members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty have improvised a way to avoid appearing pre-occupied with the mundane, hum-drum affairs of life. This image can be best described as a kind of perpetual running in place. Everybody tries very diligently to do his or her "own thing ." and the effect is to inject a commendable amount of chaos into nearly every situation. Again, however, out of this chaos arises a splendid sense of timing, albeit disjointed, that eventually puts the sacred and secular into their appropriate contexts.

This is where leadership comes in, and, of course, the authority which legitimizes it. Sect affairs, such as the Sunday services, daily meditation (when it is done in groups of three or more people), money-soliciting, and the recruitment or rejection of prospective new members is organized, arranged, and otherwise handled by the two "directors," Shivadas and Fred.

But Shivadas and Fred, both of whom are veterans of the hippie movement, are adept hustlers who know the ins and outs of every detail that needs attending to. With hip savoir-faire they connive, coerce, molly-coddle, and persuade. They also bicker, argue, nag, and fight a lot: They conspire with one another and vie with the other members for control of nearly every situation. And, unlike most of the other members who present a picture of collective naiveté, Shivadas and Fred are hipsters' hipsters. They are agressive, demanding, alert, and they know the other members' weaknesses, which they often drag into the open when anyone opposes their will. On the other hand, however, and this is an extremely important feature of their leadership style, they can smother the other members with respect, kindness, and devotion. The following is an example of this style:

> [Shivadas and Fred have been trying, with little success, to convince the members that the coming weekend trip to the Vedanta Ashrama should be postponed. The reason for the postponement is not clear, but it has something to do with other plans that the two have made -- perhaps they just don't want to go through the hassle of making the trip. Sheryl and Rosemarie are practically in tears because of the dirt that Shivadas has dragged them through. He claimed that their egos are always involved in everything that the devotees do.]
>
> Fred: So everybody wants to go anyway, I guess.
>
> Sheryl: Yes, we do. We're devotees, you may recall, and devotees need to spend time with the Lord. I . . .
>
> Shivadas: [He has just dumped a ton of crap on Sheryl] Oh, Sheryl, you're super far out. You're so beautiful, and you love God so much.
>
> Sheryl: Fuck you, man.
>
> Fred: It's true, Sheryl, you are a wonderful devotee, and we're wrong to try to keep you from the Lord, if that's what we're doing.

Sheryl: I know where you guys are coming from. You're going to love me into staying home this weekend. I think that's really chickenshit.

Peaches: Well, I don't think that's what's happening. Really, Fred and Shivadas love you Sheryl, and Rosemarie, too. They wouldn't do anything . . .

Rosemarie: Then why do they go on these big numbers, I mean, especially after all the plans were made. There's no reason not to go. Swami wants us to come, and . . .

Fred: Well, Rosemarie, my heart really feels what you're about, but . . .

Shivadas: Really, Rosemarie, you're so full of love.

Sheryl: And you're full of shit, Shivadas.

Shivadas: I know, I know . . . and that's not all . . .

Sheryl: Need I say more?

Shivadas: No, but I should. I'm just on another ego trip. I say I love God, but I . . . I have dedicated my life to Him, and all the rest, but I . . .

Rosemarie: Oh, Shivadas, you do love God, and you're so kind. You've given us so much. [Shivadas' eyes are glassy, and his head hangs low.]

Sheryl: Well. Why don't you want to go?

Shivadas: No, we'll go; don't listen to me.

Sheryl: O.K. I dig. The Lord doesn't want us to go or this scene wouldn't have happened, right?

Peaches: Somehow things just don't seem right.

Fred: You're right, Peaches. Why does this happen? It's a sign.

Sheryl: So the trip's off. Somebody will have to call Swami.

XUM

Peaches: Fred, why don't you do it?

Shivadas: No, I'd better. After all, it's my ego trip.

Sheryl: Oh, Shivadas, it's no ego trip. I can dig it.

Shivadas: I'll call him and say the Divine Mother isn't letting it happen. He'll understand. You guys are so far out. Thank you for being such good devotees; I really love all of you very much.*

The previous illustration shows Shivadas and Fred in one of their leadership roles. They manipulate the conversation in as underhanded a manner as possible and then take the posture of the wounded hero, or, perhaps more accurately, the posture of the blundering tyrant whose method of ruling stems from ignorance rather than from a lack of humanity. (This is the clincher and everyone usually comes around to their way of thinking.) Still, the two directors, who helped found first the dealing group and then the sect, are admired and well-liked by the other members who regard them as model devotees and all around hip, good-guys.

Once I was trying to comfort Sheryl who had come under what I thought was a particularly vehement attack for having tried to get out of baby-sitting when the other inner circle members wanted to attend a lecture in Hollywood sans children. Sheryl said to me:

> Oh, Shivadas and Fred may, uh, sound mean at times, but they're not! They keep me honest with myself. When they come down on me, it's

---

* As it turned out, several members decided to go at the last minute but couldn't get to the Ashrama because a forest fire had blocked the main highway. They reported this to Shivadas the following day. His remark: "I knew it really wasn't happening, didn't I?"

XUM

> hard on them, too. I mean, they don't dig it. But somebody has to do it, and God has picked them, I guess.

Indeed, Shivadas and Fred are regarded by others in the sect to be "instruments of God" who have been charged with the responsibility of keeping the group together and helping everyone to realize God. Should a devotee stray from the path, Shivadas or Fred is there to straighten him out. Moreover, Shivadas and Fred set an example for others in the pursuit of religious goals by meditating regularly, performing complex rituals, maintaining a strict attitude toward duty and devotion, singing Sanskrit hymns and chants, and, of course, by prodding everyone in this or that direction. However, their authority in the sect is derived from several distinct sources.

Beyond the role that their experience as hippies plays, the authority which Shivadas and Fred wield derives in part from their having studied the Hindu and Christian scriptures, particularly the _Bible_ and the _Upanishads_, although the range of their knowledge of eschatology in general is quite broad. They place a great deal of emphasis on their interpretations of these texts which convinces everyone that they are the holders of a special fund of knowledge that, by definition, only the most devoted of religionists can hope to possess. In addition, they have studied the life of Ramakrishna and his disciples and can make authoritative reference to the teachings of these saints when the occasion dictates that it is appropriate. For example, if someone expresses the notion that meditation is difficult, either Shivadas or Fred will remind him that Vivekananda, the principle disciple of Ramakrishna who introduced Vedantic philosophy to the West, once said that anyone who can prepare a chillom (a kind of Indian pipe) of tobacco can learn to meditate properly.[2]

Second, not only is their reference to scripture and to the life and teachings of Ramakrishna and his disciples what makes others listen to what they have to say, and, once having listened, act on the message, for in great part the authority of their word stems, again, from the manner in which the message is presented.[3] As I have said, Shivadas and Fred have dynamic, forceful personalities, and they are quite successful at playing encounter games. They put forth their religious interpretations of reality in very flowery language which combines the spiritual and the hip, the mystical and the utilitarian, and they have also developed a way of mimicking the way their swami talks, which is very deliberate and presumably thoroughly invested with profound wisdom. On one occasion, Shivadas was discussing with another member (in the presence of several devotees) the need for keeping company with holy persons, which is said to be a pre-requisite to spirituality:

> There was this very far out old man who was hanging out near the Kali temple. He was absolutely filthy and was eating all kinds of garbage and everything. Ramakrishna's nephew wanted to know who the hell he was, so he said to Ramakrishna, "What's happening with that cat down by the garbage pit?" Well, Ramakrishna said he was a very important sadhu (holy man), so Hriday [Ramakrishna's nephew] chased after him and begged him to teach him some shit. But the sadhu said, "Fuck you," and tried to split. Hriday kept chasing him, and finally the cat said, "Get out of here, you asshole," and picked up a stick. So when Hriday finally gave up he pulled Ramakrishna's coat and asked, "Why wouldn't that dude lay his rap on me?" And then Ramakrishna said

> something like, "Oh, he knows better than to hang out with a worldly little fucker like you. You'd bring him down in nothing flat." [Everybody laughs.] [4]

Another display of leadership style occurred when Fred was trying to convince a guest that he wasn't spiritually minded after all, despite the latter's claims to the contrary. Fred, who is well over six feet tall and heavy set, leaned in an imposing manner across the table, and, with his face not six inches from the startled guest, said in a growl, "Say'God'."

Guest:	Ulp...
Fred:	I said, "Say God."
Guest:	Er, uh, God. [It was practically a whisper.]
Fred:	[Shouting.] Say 'God'!
Guest:	[Silence. He looks down.]
Fred:	God can't hear you. Didn't you just tell me you had a spiritual experience once upon a time? Well, hip me to it. Say 'God'.
Guest:	Heh, heh. GOD! [Fred sits back and everyone claps.]
Fred:	You see, we have to get rid of our egos. Everybody thinks he knows all about God and everything, but very few do.
Guest:	Yeah, I guess you're right.
Fred:	Now, let's hear you say 'God'.
Guest:	God.
Fred:	Jesus! What an ego! God, God, God, GOD! [Others join in.] God! God!
Guest:	Wow! What's going on?
Fred:	You're on an ego trip, man.

XUM

Guest: Far out. You're on the ego trip, man.

Fred: Sure, sure, oh, Holy Man. Tell us all about how you have a direct line to the Lord.

Guest: Do you?

Fred: No, but at least I can admit it. Cry out for the Lord, man. Call His name.

Guest: Right now?

Fred: No, you'd better not say anything right now. I don't want you to come all unglued. Your ego is so precious to you, isn't it?

Guest: [Pauses; he is thinking.] Well, I guess it is, in a way.

Fred: We all have that scene, man, we all do. It's very important that you understand this.

Guest: I can dig it.

Fred: Sure, sure you can; after all, you're God's right hand man, aren't you?

Guest: But I never said that . . .

Fred: It's written all over your face, though, man.

Guest: Well...

Fred: Well, what?

Guest: Well...oh, God...GOD! [The group again applauds.]

Fred: I guess there's hope after all, but not much.

Shivadas: Really...

Performances and style of delivery on the parts of Shivadas and Fred -- especially when encounters are conducted at someone else's (preferably an outsider's) expense -- are an important source of their charismatic authority.

Usually persons do not openly fault the two directors for displaying this authority unless the person himself who is under attack "comes back" in a way that the other members deem legitimately defensible, which is, by the way, unlikely, because Fred and Shivadas invariably use forensic weaponry that few people are familiar with. At the same time, however, in order to ease tensions that arise in some encounter where Shivadas and Fred engage in inappropriate authority displays, the other members sometimes try to change the subject in a discreet but forceful manner. And, if things become too unbearable (like the above-cited encounter with the guest finally did), those present may in exasperation tell the directors straightaway to "lay off." As I said previously, too, the other members occasionally "work on" the directors' respective wives (actually "co-directors") who are enjoined to "cool out" Fred and Shivadas in the name of collective solidarity and plain "good vibes." It should thus be implicitly clear that although the sect has an ideological framework (the analysis of which occurs in Chapter IV) and has "directors" who founded the sect and still serve as its prime movers and its source of exemplary commitment and vitality, a balance is struck between the directors' charismatic authority displays on the one hand, and more or less democratic processes (actually an unstated consensual agreement) on the other. In other words, the sect does not have a charismatic leader on whose word it relies for direction, even though both Fred and Shivadas display apparently charismatic qualities from time to time. As a result

XUM

of their hustling abilities and their wide experiences in the youth culture -- and no doubt as a result of their particular personality traits -- Fred's and Shivadas' charisma is at best -- or at worst -- imitative of the most potentially revolutionary of the types of authority. The sect's guru verifies any authority they already lay claim to as a result of their superior expertise in the game of life, and, indeed, in the religion game as well. In a sense, the fact that the swami pays a great deal of attention to Fred and Shivadas makes their authority nearly incontestable. But on the other hand, Swami's charisma itself is in a highly "routinized" form, since it has been handed down by the hierocratic association (the Ramakrishna Order of India) which is charged to ritually dispense the charisma of the prophet, Ramakrishna. This means that the group can do as it pleases; that is, it can either follow the dicta of the two directors or not, as it sees fit.

Thus, since contact with the Vedanta Society was permanently established, the main legitimation of Shivadas' and Fred's authority has been derived from their close association with their guru, whom the members of the sect deem the most spiritually advanced person on earth. The swami apparently grants the two directors a great deal of time for private chats and lessons. At any rate, they are said to spend more time with him than any of the other members. This looks like favoritism, but, on the other hand, "Swami knows best," and Fred and Shivadas must, therefore, deserve all of the attention they normally get. (Once, after a particularly unnerving display of imitative charisma that caused some upset in a sect function, a member told me that Fred and Shivadas needed his holiness' instruction moreso than do the others because of the two directors' obstreperous egos.) Still, the official view of the sect members is that Fred and Shivadas have accrued, either in this life, or in a past one, "good karma," which entitles them to speak for the sect on certain --. I should say "limited" -- occasions.

After nearly every meeting with their guru, Fred and Shivadas return to sect headquarters and give a word-by-word account of what supposedly took place. The devotees gather around and listen as the two directors expound on the wisdom that has just been imparted to them. These "briefings" greatly reinforce the opinions that most members have of Fred's and Shivadas' leadership abilities; namely, that they are"truly great devotees," a designation that counts for much in the world of these young spiritual seekers. Its effect is to assure the two of a great deal of informal decision-making power -- "informal" in the sense that their ideas and suggestions (their improvisations) are taken seriously, whereas somebody with less ascriptive spiritual stature might be ignored although he may make the same suggestion. Second to that of the swami, then, their word is nearly the"gospel truth." Since most of the other devotees want very much to be in on all the things Swami says, Fred and Shivadas often turn this to their own advantage by claiming to know how Swami "actually feels" about so and so in the sect. This, of course, amounts to a social control of knowledge, and the form

XUM

of its expression is likely to make the persons whom it may concern somewhat uneasy, so they are never likely to openly oppose the two directors on their own for fear of having their élan deflated by unexpected blows to their claim for spirituality, which is what all authority supposedly rests upon.

Again, not unlike all "charismatic" leaders, Shivadas and Fred set an example for their fellow members in the sect by being the most consistent in the pursuit of religious goals. They meditate more than any of the others, are known to "do japa" (repeat the name of God) for extended periods of time and in tremendous volumes, and they make offerings to God, in whatever form, every day. Thus, whenever they suggest that everyone meditate, everyone usually does so without any hesitation. And, since they are thought to be the most advanced spiritually in the group, it follows that they should be allowed to lord over the mundane affairs of the sect, such as the money, the bringing in of new members, and organizing trips or special group activities of both a sacred and secular nature. Often, one of the directors will simply begin a ritual act, such as a prayer, and others will follow suit. Or, one of them will suggest that the time is right for instituting a program of austerity, such as abstinence from sexual intercourse, and others will usually go along. In such a case, the practicing of the austerity will usually last until Shivadas or Fred decides that enough is enough.

The vulnerability of charisma as a form of authority produces some interesting consequences for the sect. The energies which Shivadas and Fred possess are in a perpetual state of potential misuse, and when the directors get carried away with their "instrument of God" routine, a number of social processes are routinely brought into play to curb their antics and diminish their authority. Usually this means that the entire sect will rebel (or "go rational" as one devotee aptly put it) and simply not follow their dicta, with or without justification by reference to the scriptures. The invocation of "common sense" is an ordinary occurrence when the leaders get out of hand. On one occasion, for instance, Fred and Shivadas wanted to invest a sizable sum of money (around one hundred and fifty dollars) in an ikon:

Shivadas: It's only money, for Christ's sake.

Peaches: Now, Shivadas, if God wanted us to have it we would already have it.

Sheryl: That's right, Shivadas. It doesn't make sense to spend the money when I can't even pay my rent and the kids have to have their flu shots.

Fred: Bullshit. They don't need flu shots.

Peaches: Yes they do, Fred.

Shivadas: O.K. I'll tell you what; we'll charge it. I can open and account in the church's name.

Verna: You are really amazing, man.

Shivadas: And don't think I don't know it. [Everyone laughs.] No problem. We'll just charge it.

Fred: And I'll front the church some bread.

XUM

Sheryl: No way, man.

Mike: Really, you guys, it costs too damn much. We don't really need it.*

As mentioned earlier, another way in which this charismatic vulverability is played out is through subterfuge on the parts of members who oppose the directors' will. Usually several members will get together to develop an argument which they believe to be religiously or common sensically sound. Then, when the group is together they pounce on Shivadas or Fred, or both at once, and verbally batter them into submission. Shivadas and Fred have learned to take all of these assaults in stride, and they can tell when such a conspiracy exists because their usual allies (Verna and Peaches) become peculiarly evasive. Rather than attempting to exert themselves, though, they retreat and simply allow the group to have its way. When conditions are deemed more auspicious -- usually when the subject is forgotten by the others -- Shivadas and Fred will approach the problem from another angle, if, that is, they still think it is important; if not, the matter is dropped.

Another form of subterfuge is used by the members who disagree with Fred and Shivadas. The members often talk to their respective wives and convince them that this or that should or should not be done. Then the

---

* In the end everyone simply ignored Shivadas and Fred,who continued for some time to try to convince everyone that it was the proper thing to do. (To my knowledge, the ikon was never purchased.)

XUM

wives are expected to take the matter up with the directors, who are known to be "push-overs" where their wives' wishes are concerned. Often Peaches and Verna appeal to Shivadas and Fred on purely sentimental grounds, or, if this does not work, they show their displeasure by pouting or by maintaining a kind of strategic distance from their husbands. This quickly brings Fred and Shivadas around, because as they often say, domestic conflicts are one of the greatest barriers to spiritual advancement.

The authority of Shivadas and Fred is thus regulated by the group to such an extent that no one outwardly identifies anyone as a leader. Everybody is charged with equal responsibility for maintaining his respective household and keeping his spiritual life in good order. However, Shivadas and Fred are often sought after for their opinions -- so often, in fact, that normally things are not done or actions taken, whether they are of a private or a collective nature, without someone's first having consulted with the directors. Once, a member of the inner circle did not "consult" Shivadas or Fred about having an intra-uterine birth control device installed by a doctor. When she arrived on the scene one day after a brief absence and informed everyone that she had been convalescing, both Shivadas and Fred became indignant:

> Shivadas: Why didn't you talk to us about it?
>
> Fred: Yes, why didn't you?
>
> Sheryl: Because it was none of your business.
>
> Shivadas: None of our business! Listen, we're trying to be celibate and you go and do this.
>
> Fred: That's right! You're really into body-consciousness and pleasure, aren't you?

Sheryl: So...

Fred: Out-fucking-rageous! What kind of an attitude is that?

Sheryl: No attitude, just none of your goddamn business. I've already had one kid; I don't need another.

Shivadas: So don't ball!

Fred: You are celibate, aren't you?

Sheryl: Yes. You know I've been horny for six months. I like to get laid once in a while, even if it's only once a year.

Shivadas: It sounds to me like you're *planning* for sin; just in case.

Fred: Yeah, you have this thing to fall back on when celibacy gets too tough.

Sheryl: Oh, that's nonsense, you guys. I don't want another kid. How many times do I have to tell you?

Shivadas: O.K. O.K. But you should have talked it over with us.

Sheryl: Well...

Fred: Would you like Swami to find out about this?

Sheryl: No. And I suppose you'll find a way to tell him yourself.

Fred: He's too beautiful to be dragged through all of your shit, hon.

Shivadas: You shouldn't do anything that you wouldn't want Swami to know about.

Sheryl: Well, did you tell him about getting stoned?

Fred: He knows. He knows everything. He can read us like a book.

Sheryl: Yes, he can, but you wouldn't dare mention that.

Shivadas: O.K., but my point is that you shouldn't plan for sin.

Fred: And you should have told us about it.

XUM

Sheryl: So I'm telling you.

Fred: All you've told us is that you can't keep it together.

Shivadas: That's what the church is all about. We help each other. If you do these things, if everybody has his own little ego trips, his own fun and games all private to himself, what's the point in it all?

Sheryl: Look, you guys, lay off!

Fred: Hmm...

Shivadas: O.K., O.K., but you shouldn't have done it.

Sheryl: Beeg deel.*

This illustrates the point that I have been trying to make about the tension that exists between the autocratic rule of the two directors and the individualism of the other members. In ordinary situations Shivadas and Fred usually serve as a kind of cushion off which the members bounce their ideas, wishes and fears. Sometimes the members do what they want, no matter how Fred and Shivadas feel about it. But, more often than not, Fred and Shivadas are in control simply because of the vacuum that results when the members are busily engaged in thinking about God or attending to more secular things. Though they have learned to make it appear as though they are fair and considerate, they are sometimes accused by others of being egotists or petty tyrants. When this happens, the directors take a more moderate approach, usually one which allows someone else's initiative to guide a given emergent situation through to its expected conclusion.

---

* When Sheryl later developed a complication because the device worked itself loose, Shivadas and Fred were quick to remind her and the others who had witnessed the above exchange that this was the Lord's way of telling her to "be cool." Sheryl went back to the doctor and had it re-inserted, however, much to Shivadas' and Fred's consternation. Several of the other women in the sect told me that although one's body is one's own, it wasn't a good idea to "plan for sin." Still, I think that they sympathized with Sheryl. "It may be better to plan for sin than to have another kid," one woman told me.

Thus, Shivadas and Fred are the authoritative loci around which daily activities in the sect revolve. They have their fingers on the pulse of everyone's life and offer comments, criticisms, suggestions and encouragement. They maintain a fairly tight control over information, and they use this to get people to follow their dicta. People normally follow them because there is much affection shared between the two leaders and the rest of the members in spite of the occasional flare-ups that occur. Moreover, "knowing what is happening," whether in a sacred or a secular sense, is an important index of participation, and, ultimately, membership.

Shivadas and Fred also act as "gatekeepers" and attempt to keep undesirable people from interfering in sect life. They regularly station themselves in strategic places during services on Sundays and greet members and guests as they arrive at the "church." On several occasions, they have asked members not to bring people who they had judged to be "worldly" or who displayed some other fault. In spite of their authoritarian stature, it should be noted that -- with some exceptions -- Shivadas and Fred avoid overt displays of authority, which, even if deemed appropriate and acceptable by some of the members, might tend to cause irreparable damage to social relations within the sect. This judiciousness on their parts helps to keep life in the sect relatively stable, and everyone claims to be "as happy as can be expected, since we live in the phenomenal world." [5]

Roles

The discussion thus far has utilized the terms "member," "devotee," "director," "member of the inner circle," "member of the outer circle," and so forth. These terms, while being useful in discussing leadership, authority, commitment, economic organization, household relations, and other features of the social organization of the sect, have not, with a few exceptions, been clearly defined, nor have they been analyzed as the social roles they appear to represent.

In every social setting people adopt roles in order to relate to the other persons involved. The meanings of these roles to the participants give the sociologist a clue to the nature of their participation and the way in which situations acquire their definitions. In the Church of the Cosmic Liberty, as in most other groups in society, persons play a variety of roles, and the role which is adopted at a particular time can be viewed as a strategy which affects the interplay of personalities and meanings in a variety of situations, and in a sense defines the quality of interaction. In the Church of the Cosmic Liberty, moreover, where spontaneous involvement of the members in each social context that arises in everyday life is greatly stressed, the roles have a strongly "improvisational" character. Each member is expected to provide his own idiosyncratic interpretation of the duties and rights associated with a role that may from time to time be played. All role playing in human groups, of course, contains an element of improvisation so that the person playing the role may adapt it (within certain, usually explicit, limits) to his own abilities and needs. Erving Goffman has this to say about the role of spontaneity in interaction:

> Why should the factor of spontaneous involvement carry so much weight in the organization of encounters? Some suggestions can be made. A participant's spontaneous involvement in the official focus of attention of an encounter tells others what he is and what his intentions are, adding to the security of the others in his presence. Further, shared spontaneous involvement in a mutual activity often brings the sharers into some kind of exclusive solidarity and permits them to express relatedness, psychic closeness, and mutual respect; failure to participate with good heart can therefore express rejection of those present or of the setting. Finally, spontaneous involvement in the prescribed focus of attention confirms the reality of the world prescribed by the transformation rules [rules governing those features of the outside world that are legitimately paid attention to in the course of interaction] and the unreality of other potential worlds -- and it is upon these confirmations that the stability of immediate definitions of the situation depends.[6]

My point is that the Cosmic Libertarians emphasize the idiosyncratic aspects of role playing to such an extent that each person's input into a social context is (ideally) devoid of calculating the sense of others' expectations regarding how the role should be played. Hence, although the following role descriptions necessarily emphasize the recurrent or "structural" character of the roles, it should be kept in mind that what follows consists of heuristic categorization of a wide range of behaviors and actions, the predominant feature of which is

XUM

their spontaneous, improvisational character.

The Devotee*

The basic role that is played in sect life is that of the "devotee," and the typical interpersonal relationship is one of "devotee to devotee." A devotee is defined by the members as a person who "leads a spiritual life"; that is, a life of organized spontaneity characterized by full-time preoccupation with religious concerns (i.e. the pursuit of the Self, or _atman_). Such a person is considered to be part of the world's spiritual elect, and to play the role of devotee requires that a basic identity be nurtured, that a certain language be used in conversations, that there be a personal relationship with a bonafide religious teacher (e.g. the swami), that things contaminated by contact with the outside world be consigned to the realm of the insignificant, and that one maintain a state of perpetual readiness whereby God-realization can enter into his proverbial Self at any moment.

Members who are playing the role of devotee invariably emphasize the spontaneous in-put mechanisms that the role calls for. Sheryl, for instance, often clasps her hands together, thrusts her face skyward, and pleads with the Lord to intervene and save the devotees from the "world-bewitching _maya_." Shivadas, on the other hand, often interrupts conver-

---

* The devotee is also known as the householder. I use only one of the terms to avoid confusing the reader.

XUM

sations in order to say prayers or to offer incense, food, or drink to God. Fred does the same. So, too, do the other inner circle members spontaneously invoke the sacred in a similar manner. This role may be played over a long period of time or for short periods, depending on the social context that emerges. Usually, however, this role is reserved for strictly religious contexts, such as meditating,doing japa (repeating the name of God), and certain rituals.

The Insider

From the role of devotee comes another role which is played when outsiders are present. This is the role of "insider" which is characterized by the member's making sure that the outsider with whom he is in the process of interacting recognizes (and acknowledges) the fundamental qualitative differences between living a religious and living a secular life. The improvisational aspect of this role emerges in those instances when outsiders fail to pay obeisances to the Cosmic Libertarian way of life. When this occurs, the "insider's" task is to spontaneously counter any threats, veiled or otherwise, to that way of life. Hence, devotees playing the role of insider often make a point of the spontaneous display of social talents by indicating possession of esoteric knowledge that the outsider does not and probably could not have. In addition to contributing to the improvisational character of group life, the role of insider reinforces the boundaries of sect life as well as occasionally making the sect attractive to the outsider who may ultimately express interest in joining.

The Hippie

The role of "hippie" can be defined as that of a person who is preoccupied with matters of self and self alone, who is willing to live in the immediate present and do his or her own thing. Since the members of the sect are all "former" hippies, and to a great extent still see themselves as hip, albeit religiously so, the role of "hippie" is often played. In interaction devotees often relate to one another as hippies. The social context which usually produces this interactional mode is sometimes tangent to formal activities, such as group dinners after Sunday services, but it is more likely to be a part of informal affairs, particularly the aforementioned inter-household projects and gatherings. The emergence of hippie demeanor which the role implies appears to be instrumentally related to the strictness of religious life. That is, when austerities are in full force and the devotional attitude is particularly intense among the members of the inner circle, a certain amount of distance from the role of devotee can be had by the adoption of the hippie role. (Or, when religious fervor subsides the members may begin to play hippie roles.) Thus, the role of hippie is a kind of improvised release, and the interaction of people playing this role provides a moment, however brief, of secular interlude in the spiritual quest. The hippie role was particularly evident when the members used drugs, and it often appeared to be synonymous with the role of devotee. But after drugs were banned by the sect's guru, the hippie role became more specialized according to the aforementioned situational criteria. I should emphasize, perhaps, that even without chemical stimulation the improvisational character of the hippie role is evident. This is due, in all probability, to the fact that the spirit of the role remains although the symbol of its adoption (marijuana use) is absent.

Inner vs. Outer Circle

In the previous section the difference between members of the inner and outer circles was discussed, so it needs only brief elaboration here. It was implied that inner circle members "cultivate" (hustle) the members of the outer circle, which is to say, the latter are accorded a great deal of respect and attention, and this sometimes "pays off" in donations. The nature of such cultivation is, again, spontaneous, since it appears to depend on the nature of the interaction taking place. The members of both circles call this interaction "good manners" or "showing consideration" for others. The member of the outer circle is routinely asked about his health, his children's health, his spiritual progress, his job, and various and sundry other things that have little to do with anything but manage to pass the time quite amicably, while simultaneously creating the appearance of genuine intimacy and concern. For his part, the member of the outer circle generally displays a special kind of religious curiosity, albeit in the appropriately "disinterested" fashion, and this sometimes creates the basis for a discussion of a spiritual nature or for intense, non-verbal encounters, both of which, again, demand spontaneous involvement and participation.

The Guru

The "guru" (teacher) role is one that is played by every devotee at one time or another, especially in interaction between inner and outer circle members, but it achieves its completeness in the Vedantic swami at whose feet the devotees sit as often as the venerable monk allows. In "typical" situations, most devotees usually don't listen to the swami *per se* (when he is giving a public lecture), but rather try to soak up his wisdom by other (intuitive, spontaneous) means. In private sessions, on the other hand, the devotees for the most part listen and pay close attention to details, such as Swami's voice inflections, or to the devotees' particular feelings when something was said that had special importance. The sect often has group audiences with the swami, and in these interactional contexts everyone listens while Swami, Shivadas, and Fred discuss various spiritual matters. The role of "guru," then, is one which can arise even in Swami's absence, because it is based on what he dictates and on the devotees' interpretations and presentations of it. This role differs from that of the devotee to a certain extent, because the members believe that being a devotee means to be committed in toto to the religious life, while being a guru means that one imparts to others (and presumably to oneself) everything that the Master (Sri Ramakrishna) stood for. This is a subtle distinction, to be sure, but a real one just the same; for being a devotee implies dependency, albeit in a religious sense, while being a guru implies independent action that is coupled with a profound sense of responsibility for the welfare of others in the sect. One plays the "guru" role whenever he feels that he has a monopoly on a tidbit of wisdom, and, of course, whenever there is an audience that legitimates the adoption of the role.

The Disciple

The complement to the role of "guru" is the role of the "disciple." The latter role, like that of guru, also differs from the role of the devotee in the sense that it is more specialized. It involves the assuming of a posture of acute (and, of course, spontaneous) subservience to the guru, whether the guru is the swami himself or someone who is imparting the wisdom of the swami to another. In the sect all of the inner circle members play the role of guru, and, they all play the role of disciple, both for the swami and for one another. It is often said in the social contexts in which these roles are played (especially if anyone happens to suggest that none but the swami is qualified to be the guru, which is not altogether likely) that in order to become a guru, one must first be a disciple, while a good disciple is also a guru, and

XUM

a guru a disciple. As confusing as this may seem, the members of the sect have no problem in understanding it, because the importance of improvisation is clearly recognized. Each will have a turn at playing all roles, and each is expected to add his or her own idiosyncratic impetus to the role. The role of disciple is often played when interested outsiders are present, and in these instances either Fred or Shivadas assumes the role of guru. It (the disciple role) is also played when absentee members or outer circle members interact with the members of the inner circle. The important point (for the present discussion) is that the good disciple is the person who spontaneously identifies with the guru, just as the good guru is the one who spontaneously realizes that there is wisdom to impart and an audience who is ready to receive it. The definition of the good disciple is derived in part from a work entitled, Ramakrishna and His Disciples, by Christopher Isherwood, which is much read by the members of the sect. In addition, Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master, the authoritative biography of the "avatar of the modern age" is gleaned for its role models, particularly those of devotee, guru, and disciple.[7]

Another aspect of the disciple role is that of "follower" which is a role that is played when the directors exert their authority and others are influenced, when devotees actively subscribe to the teachings of various saints (e.g. Patanjali, Yogananda, and holy personages other than Sri Ramakrishna of whom the members are devotees), and when the members are in the presence of anyone whom they see as an important leader or personality, such as a rock and roll musician, an artist, or a well-known hip figure. In other words, the members become momentary followers of any "charismatic" leader whom they all respect, admire, and otherwise identify with, such as a religionist from another sect or from the Vedanta Society, or a swami (other than their own guru), or anyone else whose influence they hope to feel. Like the roles of disciple, devotee, guru, and hippie, the role of follower is played within an improvisational framework so that the actor will thereby enable himself and others to attain the orbit of the spiritual consciousness of the bhakti yogi (the yogi of supreme faith "for whom all religions are true").

The Hindu

This supreme faith is made manifest in the role of the Hindu to which all of the members of both the inner and outer circles aspire with highly variable degrees of ambition. The role of Hindu is, like all of the others, characterized by idiosyncratic in-puts which arise from each actor's conception of Eastern mysticism, particularly that of India, where, it is believed, the ideal of religion is acted out in daily life. The Hindu role can be played in combination with any of the others since it is one of unarticulated demeanor, of the consequences of affective spontaneous involvement. That is, it is a role that represents a self-conscious style that has been improvised from the inception. One does not attempt to play the Hindu role, and, once one is found to be playing it, he does not reflect on it as it is acted out. Rather, when one is playing the Hindu role in interaction with another who is playing the Hindu role, or any other role for that matter, the situation is characterized by a latent passivity, which is perceived by the actors as a combination of wisdom and devotion, guilelessness and gentle understanding. In other words, to the sect members, the role of Hindu represents the pinnacle of spiritual consciousness manifested in a "social" form. It is a role that is played over long periods of time, and, as such, it provides a framework for the adoption of other roles. It is the stage upon which other actions, including the adoption of other roles takes place.

The Hindu role, moreover, conditions the members' adoption of more conventional roles, notably those of parent, husband, wife, friend, breadwinner, man, woman, or child. Those who are parents see themselves as Hindu parents, by which is meant, parents who attempt to relate to the child directly, spontaneously, indulging him with great concern for "where the kid is at," and ultimately deifying him by defining childhood as an elevated spiritual state. They adopt the role of Hindu husband and Hindu wife, which means that they relate to the marriage partner as a god, as the source of potential, instantaneous enlightenment. As Hindu friends they are unconditionally loyal, which in interaction is the basis for the emotionally laden encounters of a spontaneous sort that is shared. (This type of "human understanding," "love," and "ritual communion," based as it is on the spontaneous, expressive in-puts of the actors, is a desired feature of

XUM

all inter-sect encounters.) When a child relates to another in play, the parents or other adults are there to guide the situation along the perceived Hindu line by teaching consideration for the state of another's being, reducing friction to a minimum, and by defining the spontaneous sharing of the immediate presence of the other (next to that, of course, of God-realization or the playing of enlightened spiritual seekership roles) as the highest goal.

Finally, the role of Hindu is what can be termed an "essential" role, and the playing of it creates a "self-implicating" form of action in which the actor becomes what he essentially, characterologically is -- a religious person, and, ideally,a person to be perceived as God Himself. All of the other roles are likewise essential ones, but unlike the Hindu role which is "pure," the roles of hippie, leader, follower, devotee, disciple, and so on are more or less instrumental roles. That is, they contain quasi-instrumental aspects in the sense that they are believed to lead the individual to the Hindu state of being. Each member of the sect aspires to Hindu consciousness, which is the state of mind governing the playing of the Hindu role. Sociologically speaking, the Hindu role is a vehicle for the expression of values that Cosmic Libertarians place in their life style. For the members of the sect the Hindu role is the medium of God-realized truth, the ultimate role that the self-perfected soul can play in the world. Members who play the role are routinely accorded high status. Thus, the good devotee is the one who can play the Hindu role of utter devotion to the guru, to the required rituals, and to Sri Ramakrishna.

A good guru is one who can relate the message of the highest living Hindu, the swami. A good disciple never strays from the Hindu path. A good leader is a sober, just, wise (and possibly hip) Hindu. The ideal parent, child, lover, friend, adult, worker is the disinterested Hindu who exhibits complete control over the "senses" and a total commitment to the perfection of himself and others. He is work and devotion incarnate. Disinterested, he takes good and evil in stride, since happiness and sadness are to him one and the same thing. His ultimate goal is to merge with the "invisible order behind life" (*Brahman*, the universal consciousness, or, *atman*, the individual soul), but if he somehow falls short of his goal, all is not lost, for, as one member put it, "The true Hindu simply is."

Social Contexts

Observing social life in the Church of the Cosmic Liberty over a period of time revealed a number of recurrent interactional contexts in which the behavior of the participants is more or less routinized but at the same time subject to wide variation by virtue of the emphasis placed on spontaneity and improvisation. As I have said elsewhere, these social contexts give continuity and direction to group life. Several of these social contexts are designated by particular names, such as meditating, fasting, talking of God, worshipping and praying, grooving, feasting, hustling, rapping, and doing japa (repeating God's name). These names denote the behavior that takes place in each social context, and they provide the participating members with the "opportunity" to play innovative roles and to improvise the social identities associated with the roles. Moreover, the social contexts are the means by which the previously discussed distinction between social groupings within the sect becomes meaningful. From the various social contexts, then, social roles are played in a more or less routine fashion, albeit with idiosyncratic variation, and the distinction between groups, such as the inner and outer circles, leaders, and absentee members becomes institutionalized. I will discuss each of these important social contexts in turn and show how they are affected by the improvisational character of sect life and how they facilitate the formation of social groupings within the sect. These descriptions, it should be noted, do not exhaust the richness of the sect's social and cultural systems, but are intended to illustrate the role played by improvisation.

Meditating

The most important social context in the Church of the Cosmic Liberty is "meditating." Meditating involves a member's playing the role of the Hindu devotee, and since meditation occurs with almost daily regularity among the members of the inner circle who gather at the "church," this collective "spiritual exercise" gives rise to the members' definition of themselves as an "inner circle." Moreover, meditation is each individual's daily religious in-put, and is done in private before small shrines located in each member's home.

When the members of the inner circle meditate together, they appear to do so spontaneously; that is, no appointed hour is set aside for group meditations, but when the members find themselves together in the "church" setting, they generally decide at some point to meditate. Usually such collective meditations are begun when one or more members finds himself to be "in a spiritual mood" and expresses a desire, either verbally or non-verbally, to meditate to others in the group who are present. One's intention to engage in meditation is displayed in a very subtle manner. This becomes a further means by which a routine distinction between those who "really know how" to meditate and those who don't (i.e. those who are mere "aspirants") is made. After some preliminary discussion or after the finishing of immediate tasks, the members then take turns washing their hands and faces. The women put on their chandras (Hindu shawls) and the men take off their shoes. When everyone is ready the group silently arranges itself in a semicircle around the shrine that is located in the "church's" front room.

According to the members the above preliminary actions that precede meditation are "designed" to make everyone calm and quiet. The members "greet the Lord" (or "salute the Lord") by prostrating themselves before the shrine. They remain with their heads to the floor for some time, usually two or three minutes. Then the members closest to the shrine light incense sticks, along with several votive candles. Sometimes the incense is passed around, and each member moves the burning stick in a slow, spiral-like motion above his head. When this act is completed, the members attend to the business of getting comfortable in the cross-legged, lotus position. The back is held straight, but not rigidly so, and the hands rest in the lap. When this is accomplished, one of the members, if it occurs to him to do so, will then begin to chant in Sanskrit, and he is sometimes, but not often, joined by the others. Usually a few phrases from the Upanishads appear to suffice, and when the chanting is over, the members will begin to sing (or chant) "Om" in a long drone. This is repeated several times, and it is often accompanied by the rhythmic sounding of finger cymbals, tiny bells, or other sound-producing devices (e.g. drums, gongs, etc.) that members may have brought with them for the occasion. After a few minutes of this, silence engulfs the room. In the meantime, flowers will have been offered to this or that deity by different devotees.

Meditating is described in a variety of ways by the members, but most see it as a prescribed manner of paying acute, religious attention. Much fuss is made over the proper way to meditate, and there is considerable variation on the main theme, the actual techniques of which the members learned from their guru. In practice, meditating involves concentrating on the chosen ideal, Sri Ramakrishna, and the mental repetition of a "word-symbol" (a holy name of God) over and over again. Before the mantra (Sanskrit for "word-symbol") is repeated, prayers are mentally recited, momentarily regulated breathing is practiced, and the devotee attempts to dispense with all irrelevant and irreverant thoughts. When the mind "becomes empty" (more or less, one would have to suppose), the meditators concentrate their thoughts on the heart area, where it is believed

Sri Ramakrishna (the living symbol of the Divine in man) resides. Then, the object of meditation becomes that of bringing all of the devotee's attention to the Divine, and the repetition of the mantra begins.

Meditating generally lasts around an hour, and it is followed by an extended period of silence, which the members describe (using the language of the drug culture) as "coming down." During this process any feelings that relate to the quality of the completed meditation are expressed in the most positive of terms. These feelings are often communicated as descriptions of what was experienced, or they relate generally to the virtues of group meditations and how meditating contributes to the "spiritual mood" of the group and even benefits the unfortunate, lowly "spiritual aspirant" who can merely "imitate" the "true devotees."

It is important to note that the members do not regard praying or other forms of silent worship as meditation. On the contrary, only those who have been given a mantra by a bonafide guru "actually meditate." A devotee, it will be recalled, is someone who has chosen Ramakrishna or some other Hindu god or saint as an "ideal" and who has become a "disciple" under a guru's tutelage. The members believe that meditating together enables them to be as close to "true Hinduism" as is possible while playing the devotee and disciple roles in a Western context. Moreover, these meditations are seen to help in the reinforcement of the solidarity of the inner circle and to distinguish between the devotees and the rest of the members.

It should be mentioned, too, that the shrines that each person has constructed are different from one another. Sheryl's shrine, for instance, is quite large and has a number of pictures of the sect's guru on it, together with a variety of containers for flowers and other offerings, such as food. The shrine of Mike and Tina, by contrast, is very small, and it contains only the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and his "spiritual wife or consort," Sri Sarada Devi (also known as Holy Mother). The main shrine located in Shivadas' and Peaches' flat (i.e. in the "church") contains all of the artifacts found on the individual member's shrines. This, I think, further illustrates the manner in which each member is expected to improvise a religious role for himself, and furthermore, how the sovereignty of the Cosmic Liberty Church symbolized in the main shrine represents the sum total of the individual religious improvisations.

Doing Japa

The routine distinction between groups is also reinforced by a social context known as "doing japa," which is an adjunct to meditation. Doing japa involves the mental repetition of the mantra ("word-symbol" or name of God, such as "Om") while counting bead by bead on a rosary. Possession of a rosary is a kind of symbol of inner circle identification, since only those who have undergone a formal initiation by the swami into the religious life have these beads. Such initiations come to those who prove their sincerity to the swami, the proof belonging to realm of the mystical. The ritual itself is a private affair between the initiates and the officiating swami, so its nature is not known to this reporter. However, many of the members have described the initiation as a milestone in their personal lives and as a constitutional event in the natural history of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty.

> The initiation is far out, man. I can't tell you too much about it because it's, like, sacred, and, uh, very personal...dig? But what basically happens is that your guru takes on the responsibility for your karma and for your spiritual progress, and he gives you a mantra he thinks is where it's at for you. The mantra is like a sound, and if you repeat it enough times it envelopes you and you merge in it -- you become one with it, you become one with God...dig? Because the mantra is God...[What else happens in the initiation ceremony?] Oh, well, you may be given instructions; I guess we all got instructions of, uh,instructions on how to meditate, and when, and stuff like that. You come away sort of like charged, you know, higher than you've ever been. The guru has given you something that will put you in touch with God, and he assumes responsibility for you. But you have to do exactly, exactly what he says or it doesn't do any good. You can do japa for a million years and it still won't cancel out your bad karma if you've got some kind of ego trip going. Like the swami or the guru or whatever prescribes a certain amount of japa for you to do, depending on how he reads your general vibe, depending on where your head's at. We always try to do more because, like, Ramakrishna would probably say something like, "The more japa the better." You can do it anytime or anyplace. Sometimes I even do it in my sleep, I mean, dream about it...dig? Or when you're just rapping, you know, like right now I could do it. It's a super high, super! Better than t.v. or acid. I mean when you get it on, it is. If you try to get high behind it, you miss the real benefit. I mean, you can get high, but it's a super down compared to where you can be if you do it behind loving God. [Did the initiation get you high?] Wow, are you kidding, we were blown out of our skulls. Really, man, totally blown. I mean, I can just think about it and I get blown.

The mantra that is received in the initiation ceremony is a kind of individually prescribed formula for the devotee's salvation. It's possession involves an agreement between guru and disciple; the guru takes on the responsibility for the salvation of the disciple, and the disciple in

XUM

accepting the mantra from the guru agrees to give everything to God, that is, to mentally renounce all future claims to the world, and to place oneself in the guru's hands. The mantra, it is said, should never be spoken aloud or told to anyone, lest it thereby lose its magical potency. Still, in the sect each person's mantra is a "known" secret, and on several occasions I have heard them repeated aloud, and on at least one occasion, discussed (while hippie roles were played).

One usually does japa on his or her own, since the beads themselves are somewhat taboo and must be shielded from the vision of the uninitiated. Sometimes, however, a group of people from the inner circle does japa together during group meditations in the"church" or at the Vedanta Temple in Hollywood. As the above-quoted member stated, the guru assigns a different amount of japa to each member. Some inner circle members do as little as a few hundred japa a day, while others do as many as several thousand.

Japa contributes to the improvisational character of social life in the sect in the following manner: Because one of the requirements of devotion to God (according to Cosmic Libertarians) is that the devotee must spend as much time as possible doing japa, members often satisfy this requirement by doing japa (with or without using the rosary at the same time) as they do other things, such as reading, cooking, walking to town or beach, driving to this place or that, and so on. Sheryl told me:

> Japa sort of opens up your head. I do it around the house, you know, while I'm taking care of the baby or something like that. Everything goes better because all of the cobwebs and bad karma

> and everything just sort of disappear. So this kind of allows things to happen as they are bound to happen. You know, everything flows, and you are in tune with it instead of struggling against it.

The effect of eight or ten people doing japa intermittently over a period of several days is profound. Spontaneous pronouncements on the virtues of the religious life proliferate. New projects, such as group trips to the beach, or variations on the Cosmic Libertarian Sunday services are discussed, or suggestions about ways to improve the "spiritual trip" are offered. One afternoon, a Saturday, I believe, I made a trip by myself to a nearby grocery store to buy some paper plates for the post-meditation feast that was planned for the next afternoon. When I returned to the "church" a half-hour later, Shivadas, Peaches, Sheryl and Rosemarie were in front of the altar, beads in hand. Shivadas had his guitar on his lap. Later, Rosemarie told me that they had been doing japa in order to "come up with a new song" for the Sunday worship. (It apparently succeeded, because the new song was sung the following day, much to the delight of the entire inner and outer circle membership.)

Finally, the varying amounts of japa that each member is assigned to do (or actually does) requires that members spend different amounts of time in this activity. Interestingly, Shivadas, Peaches, Fred, Verna, Sheryl and Rosemarie, all of whom are important innovators in that most of the practices--spiritual or otherwise--in the Cosmic Liberty Church originated with (or were borrowed from other sources by) one or several of them, are assigned the most japa to do by the swami. This group spends around a fifth of its waking hours in the doing japa social context, and, as a consequence, their solidarity as a group is greatly reinforced even as the moral purity of their social and religious improvisations legitimated by virtue of their remaining in the requisite state of "spiritual openness."

Worshipping and Praying

In addition to meditating and doing japa there are other social contexts which have a ritual flavor and which contribute both to the formation of sub-groups within the sect and to the life style's emphasis on spontaneity and improvisation. In the contexts of worshipping and praying the roles of Hindu husband, wife, parent, friend, etc., devotee, inner or outer circle member, disciple, and guru are played. The playing of these roles involves a wide range of ritual and semi-ritual behaviors which have for the most part a spontaneous, situational origin, and in these social contexts, which extend to nearly every facet of sect life, improvisation becomes especially important.

Members of both the inner and outer circles often light incense or candles or offer prayers to this or that deity whenever they feel like doing so. Usually, such offerings are so spontaneous in nature that their effect is to change the definition of a situation and to produce an entirely new direction for group activity. For example, meditating usually lasts around an hour, but if a member is seen to be involved in the saying of additional prayers or the lighting of additional candles or incense, the context of religious worship emerges as the other members then join the improvised ceremony.

An offering or a prayer or the saluting of the Lord (which may or may not involve the ceremonial placing of flowers on the shrine) are undertaken from the prostrate posture or from the knees with hands clasped in the typical supplicating manner. These acts usually last only a few minutes, but they may occur several times during the course of a day, such as during meals as the food is about to be eaten, during informal discussions, and, again, whenever one is so moved to invoke the Lord. Involvement in and initiation of such acts creates the special worshipping-praying context. Others automatically join in, since there is no legitimate way to remain outside of the emergent context. Such acts show others how committed one is to the goal of God-realization, and, of course, this helps to convince actors of their own sincerity and devotion because they are immediately and for long periods thereafter regarded by others as "true Hindus."

Although I have not personally witnessed them, Shivadas has performed weddings for several couples in the sect and for several outsiders who somehow learned about the sect. At these ceremonies the devotees chant, sing, offer food and flowers to various deities, and so on. The couple getting married is invited to "write its own ceremony," or Shivadas plans it for them. He selects appropriate passages from the Bhagavad Gita or the Upanishads, reads from The Prophet by the visionary Lebanese poet, Kahlil Gibran, and sings songs written by himself or by the other Cosmic Libertarians.

XUM

Whenever someone perceives that things are not in order -- there may be, for instance, some friction between members about to surface -- the troublesome issue will be offered to God in order to "free the devotees from attachment [to it]." Holy books are often carried around and read while other activities are going on.[8] Or, pictures of Ramakrishna or of the guru are carried around and talked or prayed to. Finally, work that is undertaken is ceremonially offered to God beforehand, and, usually, when the work has been completed. Whenever anyone is seen doing any of these things he is joined by the others who are present, or else others may simply maintain silence (sometimes with their heads bowed) out of deference for the person performing the ceremony and the sacred object that the prayer or worship is being directed to. Invariably this interrupts conversations and other group activities, and, as I have said, changes the social course of events. Members who introduce new practices that are witnessed by the other members are verbally praised, especially when the others take up the practice themselves at the moment of their inception or later on their own or with the group.

The social contexts of praying and worshipping help, too, to raise the "Hindu consciousness" of the sect. In everyday life (as might be suspected) the members of the sect, in spite of the many safeguards that arise to prevent it, sometimes slip into the roles associated with their "former selves" (i.e. their "selves" before the religious transformation occurred), so in order to invoke the new religious identities that are commensurate with the role of inner circle member, outer circle member, devotee, leader, disciple and guru, the members improvise behaviors and practices that allow them to take up any of these roles and thereby shed their worldly identities and actualize their new ones.

Talking of God

The Church of the Cosmic Liberty has a rich oral culture, and verbal skills are highly prized. Thus, another social context in which the hegemony of Hindu consciousness is typically invoked is that of "talking of God ." This context arises at any time during which two or more people begin to discuss religion, the scriptures, the swami, Hindu mythology, Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples, and so on. Such discussions are considered by the Cosmic Libertarians to be a form of spiritual exercise because "talking of God helps to keeps one's mind constantly on the spiritual plane," and this is a requirement for realization. Nearly all of the members of the sect, but in particular the original remaining founders, have mastered a large body of religious literature and mythology and are able to discourse at length on different themes that are appropriate to the situation at hand. The "talking of God" contexts are high points in the group's social life because in the animated, emotional verbal testimonies and/or confessions, analyses, and inquiries that take place, the participants' spirits are raised, and perceptions of the world are mediated by the group's sense of the emergent Hindu consciousness. Hence, in these exchanges of ideas the mythic content of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty

XUM

is greatly enlarged, expanded and otherwise improvised upon. Each facet of life or religion that is discussed is actively grounded in the daily experience of each participating member.* For instance, Shivadas was once explaining at length how aspects of Krishna's and Radha's lives (they were, respectively, incarnations of Vishnu -- the preserver -- and his consort) applied to those of him and Peaches. As the explanations went along, others began to offer their own parallels. Finally, with the mood of the group light and friendly, Rosemarie knelt before the altar and prayed aloud, "Oh, Lord, thank you for sending us these wonderful devotees who are teaching us how to love you above all else." The "talking of God" ritual ended at that moment and it was decided that the group should meditate on "the lotus feet of the Lord"(Krishna, in this particular case).

While taking of God, then, the members of the sect may play various roles, all of which contribute to the air of religious sociability that characterizes the situations in which it occurs. The person who is speaking generally plays the role of guru. The listeners, for their parts, may play the roles of devotees, followers, disciples, members of the inner and the outer circles, or simply that of the wise, aloof Hindus. Because the guru role changes hands frequently (as do the others) when different persons

---

* Peter L. Berger would call this "inductive faith." "Put simply, inductive faith moves from human experience to statements about God, deductive faith from statements about God to interpretations of human experience." In the Cosmic Liberty Church, as we have seen, both kinds of faith are practiced. See, Peter L. Berger, A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., Anchor Books, 1970), p. 57.

XUM

spontaneously offer stories, anecdotes, epiphanies, or parables with a religious flavor, message, or application, the social context of talking of God provides the opportunity for the members to enhance their prestige in the eyes of others and to legitimate their own claims to "political" authority and a religious identity. Even the person playing the role of disinterested Hindu -- who, though he may not speak, can be seen doing japa as the others talk -- contributes to the improvisational theme that governs the event. (His "openness" may remind others of the requirement that they be "open.") Each person takes great pride in being able to lead group discussions or in being able to add an important point to what has already been said. Often members are purposely "given the floor" by others who want them to demonstrate their verbal skills (or lack of them), and, by implication, the degree of their religious commitment, since the members believe that one's ability to articulate without advance warning the thaumaturgic qualities of everyday religious practices is directly related to the level of spirituality he has attained; that is, the more advanced one is spiritually, the more articulate and relevant is his participation in the talking of God context, the more "in tune" he is with his proverbial Self.

Talking of God contexts are, too, testimonial/confessional rituals which not only serve to elevate the improvisational character

XUM

of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty to the status of a moral imperative and in so doing to enhance Hindu consciousness for the group, but they become important arenas of social control as well. Every member, whether he is fully or tangentially involved in sect social life is expected to participate in the talking of God contexts by testifying to the miraculous powers of meditation, to the subtle truths contained in the *Upanishads*, to the inspirational aspects of the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi (Holy Mother), the swami, or some other saint, sage, seer or god, or else by confessing that one's own level of spirituality is so low that the truth, beauty and wisdom of the Lord, while having been ideationally conceived, has not been directly experienced. This gives the other members the opportunity to assess each individual's claim to religion and to intervene in a way that will reinforce the goals of sect life. Members who are shirking their religious obligations, it is believed, will always be found out, since those who aren't can spontaneously articulate their experiences to the group in such a way that their spiritual consciousness uplifts the entire group and turns the context into a celebration (through worship or prayer) of the Hindu mystique. Those who attempt to shrink into the background in the talking of God contexts are sometimes verbally abused by the others until they own up to their backsliding habits. When such confessions are made the moral order is greatly reinforced, and the confessor, in publicly recognizing his fault, thereby promises to attempt to correct it.

On occasion, especially when spirits are low because of inter-personal rivalries or because several members may be "in a bad mood," the talking of God contexts are a "bring-down"; that is, they raise doubts in the minds of the devotees rather than contributing to the elevation of the group's spiritual consciousness. When this occurs, it usually happens that attempts are made to change the definition of the situation through a series of spontaneous religious acts, such as were described in the previous discussion of worshipping and praying. Once when I was in attendance at a talking of God ceremony, I was asked to describe what spiritual truths I had realized on a trip to several European countries. Before I had mumbled even one faltering sentence, several people had left my side and were alternately engaged in saluting the Lord, lighting incense, and so on. Sheryl, who wanted me to continue, called everyone back. With some hesitation they returned, only to hear that my trip had been a fairly ordinary one, and that I was neither spiritual enough or "open" enough to offer some spur of the moment insights into the religious implications of international travel. Finally, Sheryl announced that "everyone [had] been brought down enough" by my "worldliness," so "we should get into [do] something else instead." At this, Shivadas produced a copy of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, read half a page, and then handed the book to me. I read for a while, and then passed the book to Sheryl who did the same. Eventually, with little discussion beyond the subject being covered in the Gospel taking place, the context dissolved. Some members"saluted the Lord" before the shrine and went home. Others manuvered themselves out of my vicinity to become involved in doing japa or in offering silent prayers before the shrine. The next day Sheryl told

XUM

me that I had disappointed her:

> Really, man, that was a drag. But don't worry about it; it happens to everyone some time or other. Sometimes the vibe [feeling] just isn't right,and nobody gets off [is elevated]. Just try to do better next time.

Feasting

Feasting is another social context which enhances the moral conception that the members have of sect life and provides an impetus to improvisation. Feasts are weekly occurrrences which follow the sect's Sunday services. Members arrange beforehand to bring a plate of food, a cake, beverage, paper plates, napkins, or some other item. Generally it is up to the women to "plan" these ritual meals, although the men seem to find themselves involved in such things as arranging chairs around the large oak table in the "church", shopping, or simply discussing (and defining) the up-coming event among themselves.

The meals usually emphasize creative dishes, such as casseroles of vegetables topped with curry powder, special cakes and jams, home-made breads, pies, and various Indian dishes, such as chana, puri, and curried rice, and condiments, like lime-pickle and chutney. Most of the women in the group define themselves as gourmet cooks, so they take great pride in serving exotic dishes. On the occasion of the feast those in attendance compliment one another on their culinary skills, a gesture which helps to assure continuing experimentation with food preparation.

All of the food eaten at ritual feasts is offered to God. Usually this is done before the feast begins by the individuals who prepared the various dishes. In each home's kitchen there is a small shrine which serves as the place where food is offered to God. The offering of food, of course, is a matter of individual importance to the person who prepared it, so the manner in which it is offered varies considerably from person to person. Some women merely place it on a hot plate, light a candle or two, and silently offer the food with a prayer. Others light incense and candles and may also offer flowers to God along with the food, together with a hymn or a brief chant or two.*

Although the members of the sect usually eat meat during the week, the ritual feasts consist of vegetarian foods done in the East Indian motif. As the meal begins, Shivadas and Fred usually offer prayers. Then, each person will say a prayer to him or herself. While the eating is going on -- and it usually follows meditation and group singing, so the devotees are in a religious mood to begin with -- everyone "talks of God," meditation, japa, Swami, or some other important aspects of sect life. Often during such feasts, the members of the outer circle are plied with compliments which makes them feel that the solidarity of the group extends to them, too.

Other feasting contexts arise more spontaneously. Sometimes women in the group "secretly" plan a meal among themselves, and, without advance notice come to the church with the food and the meal begins. Also, Fred, who is the wealthiest member of the inner circle, sometimes takes the inner circle out to dinner. The group has several favorite restaurants in the area, so these trips are especially well-liked. The "talking of God" context occurs in these public places, too.

---

* The Vedanta Press in Hollywood and the various publishing houses operated by the Ramakrishna Order in India publish numerous works containing both transliterated Sanskrit and English texts. This is one source for the chants that the Cosmic Libertarians occasionally use. Another source is the swamis, who chant and sing during services at the Vedanta Temple. These chants are sometimes tape-recorded and then memorized.

The ritual feasts provide an additional modicum of fluidity to social life in the sect by making it possible for everyone to play any role that he chooses. Members with varying degrees of committedness to the religious way of life come into extended fact-to-face contact during feasts, which gives them the opportunity to evaluate and define their own position relative to the other members in the sect. (A discussion of "fasting," the ritual counter-part to "feasting" appears toward the end of the present chapter.)

Rapping and Hustling

Finally, two social contexts which are important in the daily lives of the sect members and which contribute to the improvisational motif that is highly prized by the inner circle are those of "rapping" and "hustling," Rapping involves (secular) conversations between members, who, for the occasion, take the role of hippie. Generally, rapping is in a sense a "survival" of the pre-sect marijuana dealing scene that most of the present inner circle members participated in, a scene that also emphasized improvisation and the oral skills of the participants. Rapping can occur at any time, but it is especially prevalent when members of the opposite sex are conspicuously absent, when members of the sect come into contact with outsiders who are hippies, and when members are away from the "church" (e.g. at the beach, store, and so on). Rapping thus seems to be utilized as a means by which the members can momentarily revert to non-religious roles without threatening sect solidarity. The only difference between rapping and talking of God, therefore, is the subject. If rapping occurs out of context, so to speak, several members will invariably attempt to transform the situation into one which has a sacred motif. This is, of course, accomplished in a variety of ways, but the standardized, if situationally spontaneous, procedure is for a member to break from the rapping context and bow before the shrine, in other words, to suddenly pray or make an offering of some kind to God, an action which usually changes the definition of the situation.

Because of the positive light in which it is regarded, rapping is often justified as a kind of bonus, of which only the most worthy members may occasionally partake when their religious lives are in order. Novices or outer circle members who have not "proved themselves" in the religious arenas of sect life are not entitled to rap with the abandon of the "true devotee." In fact, the inner circle members routinely circumscribe conversations with these people by confining the subject-matter to specific religious topics or to "harmless" topics like the weather, someone's health, and so on. (See the previous discussion of the hippie role.) An important consideration to keep in mind is that rapping and the context of rap sessions as such serve to link the members in a special way to the outside world, in particular, to the youth culture. Members who adopt the hippie role in rapping contexts may do so in order to give their status as hip, Hindu religionists

XUM

a kind of "worldly" authenticity (that is, a secular grounding), which, as contradictory as it may appear to the reader, is an important means by which the individual sect member's autonomy can be preserved in the otherwise potentially threatening religious setting, where the "total institutional" atmosphere sometimes requires that individuals defend (or attack) actions and character traits that would be considered normal "on the outside." Being able to rap with the hippies who occasionally visit the sect or who are encountered on the streets and then to revert back to the role of devotee has the effect of convincing the sect members that they are not socially inept people whose only alternative to being "down and out" is to seek the protective umbrella of the religious life. On the contrary, rapping reinforces the view that they have of themselves as autonomous individuals who have taken up religion out of choice. Thus, in rapping contexts the autonomy of individuals is given a more or less free reign. While the scope of this autonomy is routinely limited in sect life, in spite of the fact, as we have seen, that individuals are expected to improvise on various religious identity-themes, in rapping contexts it appears that few constraints on individual autonomy exist. When the rapping context dissolves and the members once again become devotees who talk of God, worship, pray, do japa, or meditate, the solidarity of the collectivity is reinforced as is the individual's sense of having joined the collectivity voluntarily.

Hustling is another social context which enables the members to bridge the gap between the outside world and the sect, while at the same time enabling individuals to improvise. Rapping often leads directly to hustling when utilitarian aims, such as the recruitment of new members or the securing of funds or supplies for the sect become objects of concern in the course of a rap. Hustling likewise involves the members in the playing of hippie roles, because religious roles are inappropriate for the economic activities that hustling implies. The wiser one is in the ways of the world, the more successful is the hustle likely to be. Members of the outer circle may be hustled for donations, as previously mentioned, and sometimes the members attempt to get stores to give them discounts and other dispensations that normally go to clergymen. While the strategies used may involve the presentation to others of a needy, righteous ,religious self, underlying the presentation on the part of the hustler is the understanding that he is dealing with "squares" who must be manipulated and performed for. Thus, Shivadas often represents himself to others as a "minister," Sheryl represents herself as a "nun," and others present themselves as "monks" or "nuns" as they may deem it necessary to get a discount, a donation, or access to free goods and services from unsuspecting merchants, clerks, outer circle members, hippies, and so on. Again, when persons adopt these roles and identities for utilitarian purposes they do so as hippies and not as devotees or religionists. In this way the roles appropriate to religion are not, in their minds, rendered impure, and the ends which hustling brings about justify the means by which they were accomplished. In other words, occasional hustling, though it entails the temporary opting out of the religious roles and the contexts in which these roles are played helps

XUM

the group to maintain its existence as a sect. Moreover, since members are encouraged to nurture the style of hustling that best suits their capabilities and their needs, this is another area in which improvisation receives structural support.

Everyday Life: An Overview*

The morning begins in each household with babies demanding to be fed and changed. Mothers arise and attend to these chores, and, perhaps, when the child is settled down with a bottle, they meditate. When the men arise, breakfast is in order, which is made while the latter meditate and say the morning prayers. Then, at around 9:00 A.M. the day formally begins. Members of the inner circle with their morning meditation behind them begin to arrive at the "church." Sometimes the women bring their laundry which they wash and dry in the room beneath the flat amidst much celebration of their collective lot. The men, meanwhile, discuss sect affairs, and various religious and secular topics. Sometimes different members read various books which Shivadas has in his religious library. After a while, those present may decide to meditate or to do japa. Before this occurs, arrangements are made for one or two of the women to keep the several children quietly occupied in the back room.

---

* Prefatory to the discussion of the whole cultural system which is undertaken in Chapter IV, I thought that it would be appropriate to include here some of the impressions I have of everyday life in the sect. Therefore, I am including several descriptive accounts of what I take to be "typical" days in the lives of the Cosmic Libertarians. Some of the materials presented in the previous chapters and sections are intentionally repeated. Hopefully, its existential grounding will help to further depict sociologically certain aspects of sect life that are not necessarily evident from the previous discussion. In this way, too, I can include materials that do not readily fit into the discussion of social groupings, economic organization, social roles, and social contexts. Finally, I thought such impressionistic descriptions would underscore the importance of the sect's ideological framework, which is discussed at length in Chapter V.

The days I chose to include here are typical in the sense that they are recurrent. What takes place on a typical day is, of course, subject to wide variation, in part because of the emphasis placed on spontaneity and expressive behavior (i.e. on improvisation), but also because of the contingencies that inevitably arise.

After the group meditates discussions take place. These discussions usually concern the progress that the members may or may not be realizing in their spiritual lives. Such discussions may last until late afternoon, with different people coming and going. Trips to the store, to the post-office, and to the beach usually occur during the afternoon, and, phone calls are made and received to and from members of both the inner and outer circles. Even on the phone, the topic of conversation is nearly always of a religious nature.

As the members of the inner circle interact the scene is one of occasional side-trips into the sacred sphere. That is; when members pass before the shrine or by one of the many religious pictures and posters that adorn the walls of the flat, prayers are said, flowers offered, incense lighted. This has an interesting impact on the overall group feeling in that as the day progresses, the religious attitudes of the members become quite expressive. Moreover, on-going evaluations of the day's activities are offered by everyone present. The more prayers are offered, the more people talk of God. The more people talk of God, the more they desire to express the nature of their developing subjective religious mood. The more these moods are expressed, the better the day is. The better the day is, the more likely is the next day to be even better, and it may, perhaps, be decided that conditions are conducive for the instituting of a day of silence, a day of fasting, or a day of worship and prayer.

As the mundane routines of eating, washing clothes, cleaning the house, mailing letters, returning and asking for favors, shopping for groceries, making clothes, and the like are acted out, the members attempt to couch everything in the religious frame of reference by dedicating, with much ceremonial zeal, the fruits of their efforts to God. Thus, peeling potatoes or sewing a button on a blouse become sacred acts which give the devotee the proper attitude toward work. If this attitude were not nurtured, then one's ego would become involved with the result that "bad karma" (cosmic retribution) would accrue and eventually drown the devotee in troubles. Often the devotees can be seen doing japa, or at least silently repeating their respective mantras as they work at mundane tasks. Without judging the effect of this on their temperaments, it can be said that all of the devotees in the inner circle show a great deal of patience where the secular trivialities of existence are concerned. Most have developed an elaborate philosophical system which enables them to see the micro-cosmic aspects of life as inextricably bound to the entire cosmos. Thus, no work is too important or

XUM

unimportant to carry out.

This is not to say, however, that the members of the inner circle perform their duties like boy scouts trying to earn merit badges. On the contrary, when they feel that work interferes with their religious life--usually because it is arduous or routine--then it is avoided, delayed, or given to someone else to do. The idea that work is "service to the Lord" actually lies near the foundation of an edifice of anti-work sentiments that in part define the members' rejection of the middle class ethic. Thus, on a typical day--if any day in the life of a self-styled Hindu can be called typical, since each waking moment is charged with a latent expectation that God-realization may come--even work is seen as a kind of leisure, that is, as fun; otherwise it is not considered to be worthy even of one's secular, let alone one's sacred, involvement. This creates a kind of playful atmosphere that takes some of the gloom out of day-to-day self-analysis and group austerity. Thus, even though the members regularly refer to themselves as religionists, as people who take the entire business of spirituality and God-seeking utterly seriously, at the same time they approach the trivial in daily life with a good deal of humerous candor.

The impression I am trying to convey is not one in which the joyous celebration of the religious experience and of the group's "togetherness" is something that the members try to maintain at all costs. They don't, in other words, manage to see the silver lining in every cloud,though they may in fact appear to be looking for it. They don't paste smiles on their faces when they are unhappy; on the contrary, their problems manage to find expression, either in moods of depression, or worry, or in some other form that conveys to others the fact that all is not as it should be. Although there may be something grim and futile about full-time austerity and voluntary poverty, something absurd about worshipping rainbows, the members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty face this with a somewhat utilitarian notion that admits of little resignation, and even less self-abnegation, especially insofar as personal autonomy is concerned. This may appear contradictory, for it is indeed a fact of social life in the sect that people allow themselves to be criticized by others, to be moved by the group's will, to be denied a variety of normal pleasures, including the "security" that holding a job might bring. But, on the other hand, their religious convictions are particularly strong, and although the manner in which they pursue religious goals is infused with a profound sense of purpose, they are hardly fanatical. Shivadas once told me:

> We have a very laid-back style of life. We get down on each other a lot, but this is all in the game. Nobody is ever threatened, because we try to follow what Ramakrishna taught; namely, always tell the truth, but never a harsh truth. When it comes down to it, the austerities and rituals, even the scriptures, are just bullshit. I mean, they are only guidelines, prods, you might say, to point us in the direction of spiritual perfection. They aren't ends in themselves. We have a good time doing all of this, otherwise we wouldn't do it...dig? This may sound very weird to someone who doesn't understand, I guess. How can we say that celibacy is groovy? Now we don't even get high any more! We don't buy records or cars or trinkets; we don't watch t.v. or listen to the radio very much, or anything, really. Well, that's all bullshit,too, just like prayers and rituals, dig? It's all the same. So we just jam along from day to day, doing our thing, singing our song, and, in a way, getting it on. For me,

XUM

> and for most of the people who are on the trip, it's a very good life. We put everything we have into it, so it's very, very good. When we were into other things, you know, like dealing dope, or working, or going to school, or whatever, we couldn't get down; we couldn't make it happen. Now there is something happening all the time--and it means something. Like, we're becoming aware of who we are. We know what we're made of, and every day is different.

I think that the perspective that is revealed in this statement -- and it is shared to a greater or lesser extent by all of the members of the inner circle -- is that each action that is taken, each situation that arises, each challenge that is confronted or avoided has an experimental character, and this means that life itself is perceived as an experiment in truth. The members of the sect set up tests for themselves in daily life, tests that enable them to define, or determine, on a fundamental level, what kind of people they are -- if they are made of the stuff of the divine, or, if not, the stuff of something inhuman and profoundly alien; namely, "squares" or adults. In the religious setting, reality is stripped of its relativity, of its phenomenal aspects, and only the basic Self (the atman) is left; the goal is to find the ultimate truth in every aspect of existence, a truth that perhaps cannot be articulated or even shared, but a truth that is of paramount importance to the young individual, that gives him a sense of meaning and direction. The members of the sect regularly experience the problem of calling something the truth one minute and in the next of finding that it is not the truth after all. This causes little anxiety or frustration; on the contrary, it calls for laughter. Working out these knots in the cosmos that bind one to the stake of self-delusion becomes a kind of sport that requires special skills which are unevenly distributed

XUM

even among the "spiritually elect." To be sure, the stakes are high, for the members are quick to point out that if they fail in their present religious quest, then they have failed in life. (Failure here seems to mean that one would remain forever out of touch with the divine Self that is being sought after.) Ordinarily, one could reasonable assume or suspect that the level of anxiety would reach a fevered pitch under such circumstances, but this is the nature of the spiritual quest, the nature of the members' experiments with truth: Anxiety, after all, is the mere counter-part to peace. And, finally, as Ramakrishna said -- and the members put this into practice -- "God Himself will think about your morrow if you yourself cannot do so."[9]

A Day of Silence

It is a day for thinking about God, for withdrawing the mind from the chaotic impositions of the world, for listening to the still, small voice within that will guide the devotees to the ultimate realization. It is a day of retreat, of submission to the all-powerful hand of the divine, of struggle over the senses. The day of silence is a day of austerity, of trial; it is a test of the devotee's faith and devotion. If silence is to be all-pervading, omniscient, supreme, it must lie between the thought and the word, between shadow and object; it forms the surface on which is constructed the web of ignorance, our prison. Silence, thus considered, dilutes the ego, robs it of its medium, forces it to confront itself with the primal fact of its own nothingness. That one being, beyond everything, comparable to nothing, lies behind silence.

But silence, too, is the vehicle that deposits the spiritual seeker at the lotus feet of the Lord: Silence is Brahman. But speech comes so easily: Footfalls are muffled by the words and actions of everyday life. It is natural to talk, to make noise, to scurry, and sigh, and laugh. Without thinking about it, verbal messages pervade nearly every moment of wakefulness. Words engage others with the profound and the trivial; and, we engage ourselves in an on-going dialogue, embracing ourselves and the world with verbal and non-verbal tentacles.

Throats dry up when the wagging tongue ceases its seemingly interminable function, and the sound of water being poured into an earthern cup fills the kitchen. These occasional clamorous thoughts become distractions, the potential source of words that bubble to the surface and burst into the heavy air. The feet carry one to the window where the beads are tightly held and the lips form obeisances to the silence: Om.

The day of silence is a day of celestial forbearance, of beatific smiles and inner-directedness, yet the members of the inner circle spend the day together, carrying on the business of daily life in a vacuum of heavenly ambivalence, of mystic distraction.

The atmosphere that the members try to create has more to do with the obliteration of thought than with the mere absence of words. No one blurts out the unconscious words that would rend the fabric of silence, destroying that heavenly concentration. Everyone walks without making a sound. When a board squeaks or a door hinge groans, there is no cringe; no sign of apology is forthcoming. No fingers are placed to the lips.

No notes are written; no gestures are made. Eyes remain downcast, members bowing before one another. Lips move in rhythmic mystery -- the mantra is repeated, drowning out the traffic, the ocean, the sound of the wind-chime on the front porch. Fingers touch strands of japa beads and their clicking floats into the curtain of silence.

How does one eat without thinking about the food, think without forming mental words, acknowledge the presence of others without the language of signs? If a pan crashes to the floor, how does one cushion one's ears, keep one's nerves from jangling?

> You just forget about everything after a while. The silence becomes very pleasant. You feel high. It's very stoney. And the mind tunes into very beautiful things. Sometimes you can hear the Lord [Krishna] playing his flute. Sometimes, though, you just can't get it on, you know, because things happen -- somebody might come over -- well, then you just hope that the next time it'll work out. The whole thing about being silent is that it gives everybody a way to be with everyone else without going on an ego trip. It's very heavy, really, a form of, well, of meditation; no, not meditation, I guess, but something very much like it, only you are walking around and doing things. It's very peaceful when everybody gets it on; very, very peaceful.

The day of silence, I am told, begins before one is fully awake. A pre-awareness reminds the mouth that it is not to bring forth its typical obscenities, that today is a special day. One arises with a pre-cognition of the meaning of maintaining silence. Usually days of silence are well-planned in advance, with the result being that the members condition themselves beforehand by speaking very little and by cultivating a disinterested mental attitude. Silence in this institutionalized form is thus a kind of reconstructive ritual which helps to maintain the boundaries of sect life and to reduce the complexities of everyday existence to their

XUM

fundamental religious and devotional components.

Days of silence are Hindu days -- days in which the Hindu consciousness that the members constantly strive for is raised to a considerable degree. The members communicate very little with one another beyond a few gestures that are sometimes necessary, but they are aware of each other's presence, albeit in a diffident way. The members constantly do japa, and, when the fancy strikes them, they meditate, or simply pray. Flowers and food are offered to God at intermittent periods throughout the day. Everything is done to make certain that quiet will endure, and that thoughts can be directed to God. The members believe that:

> We speak of many things, parrot-like, but never do them; speaking and not doing has become a habit with us. What is the cause of that? Physical weakness. This sort of weak brain is not able to do anything.[10]

The object, then, of the day of silence is to achieve control over mind and body, a goal which the sect recognizes as a pre-requisite to God-realization. Silence, moreover, is designed to teach the devotee to give up his"attachment to the world." The members are fond of quoting Lord Krishna:

> He who performs actions dedicating them to the Lord, and giving up attachment, is not touched by sin, as a lotus leaf by water . . . The world becomes bound by action unless it is done for the sake of sacrifice. Therefore . . . give up attachment, and do your work for the sake of the Lord.[11]

But during the course of the day, interruptions may occur in the form of ringing telephones and crying infants, of unexpected guests and scraped shins. These interruptions are greeted, surprisingly, by strategic indifference, since the members are of the opinion that the Lord is doing the interrupting -- not a guest, or stranger, or child, or low-lying object. Sometimes days of silence are brought to an early close, in which case the members simply resume talking where they once left off. Generally these post-silence discussions mildly lament the fact that the silence has been prematurely interrupted, so immediate plans are made to maintain silence on another, seemingly more auspicious, day.

Normally, though, days of silence do not end until the late evening after the inner circle has completed its meditation. While the members are in the aforementioned process of "coming down", they will begin to talk -- in whispers that eventually lead to a normal speaking volume -- about what the day of silence that is just over meant to them in terms of spiritual awareness. Usually such discussions evolve into the talking of God ritual with each member taking a turn at describing what he experienced in the midst of the quietude. The group feeling in such post-silence encounters is exceedingly high. The members punctuate their remarks with embraces and light kisses on the cheeks; or,two members will hold hands and look deeply into one another's eyes.

Finally, when the elation of the day has passed on, the discussion usually turns to various problems that occurred during the enforced quiet. Whether they are of a personal or a collective nature -- meaning, whether they range from some subjective desire to speak to the entire group's difficulty in maintaining the appropriate religious climate -- the problems are discussed in some detail, and the members all take an interest in attempting to establish the probability that when the day of silence is held in the future, things will be better.

A Day of Fasting and a Day of Feasting

In the Church of the Cosmic Liberty fasting and feasting are of equal importance. Eating "holy food" (*prasad*) and abstaining from eating appear to be functionally equivalent in that they both serve to heighten the devotees' awareness of the importance of dedicating actions to God, of preserving the sect's autonomy, and of creating the conditions necessary for the advent of spontaneous religious experiences. Generally, feasting takes place every Sunday when members of the inner and outer circles come together for services. Fasting, on the other hand, is a nominally spontaneous event -- nominally in the sense that it is more or less arranged only a short time in advance, usually a few hours -- which comes about as a result of two or more members' relating the need for fasting to the others in the inner circle.

The members' attitudes toward food are not highly sophisticated, although some lip-service is paid to the natural health movement. In general, however, the members eat foods that are common in American society, foods like beef, poultry, fish, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, candy, cookies, coffee, juices, and the like. In addition, most of the women prepare East Indian foods from time to time, a particular favorite being curried rice with shrimp or chicken. All food, whether it is a single piece of fruit or bread or a complete meal,is offered to the Lord. Small shrines are maintained in the kitchen of each member's home, and it is at these shrines that the food is made into *prasad*. Before a bite of

XUM

food is taken, the members say, "Om," and, often, when a plate of food is placed before someone, he moves his hand, palm down, in a clockwise motion above the food, thus further purifying it.

In keeping with the spirit of renunciation and austerity, then, fasting and feasting are intended to purify the devotee and place him in line for a divine dispensation. As Krishna said:

> Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest in sacrifice, whatever thou givest away, whatever austerity thou practicest . . . do that as an offering unto Me . . . Whoever with devotion offers Me a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, that I accept -- the devout gift of the pure minded.[12]

Thus, it is not only prayer and meditation that helps one to attain God-realization, but the ordinary things in life must be placed within the sacred sphere, so that no errant behaviors, no idle thoughts, will obstruct one and prevent him from achieving his spiritual goals. Hence, eating is dealt with in two modes; that of fasting and that of feasting.

A day of fasting is, not unlike the day of silence, a day for prayer, meditation, and the thinking of spiritual thoughts. The members do not mention food, and, apparently try not to think about it. Usually if fasting is found to be particularly difficult because of growling stomachs or dizzy heads, some juice is taken, along with, perhaps, a cup of broth; but in the main, no food is ingested. During a day of fasting, I was told:

> It's hard to fast, man, because you don't realize how much you depend on food. I sort of unconsciously reach into the cookie jar or look in the refrigerator or just cram something into my mouth without really thinking about it. The whole point about yoga is to gain control over the senses, so we fast in order to place the food thing in perspective. As Vivekananda says, "The man that has practiced control over himself cannot be acted upon by anything outside." This is what fasting does -- it makes us strong; it convinces us that the senses don't have any real power.

The senses, fortunately or unfortunately depending on one's perspective, do have considerable power, as evidenced by the looks on the inner circle members' faces when they haven't eaten in twelve hours. It is a look of muted exasperation, and this is a far cry from the beatific, celestial auras that surround the members when they are merely being silent. Hence, fasting is a practice that is fairly high on the austerity scale, and, presumably counts for much in the way of self-deification, whereas silence reinforces the vestigial power that becomes dormant during everyday life.

During feasts, on the other hand, the mood of the members of the sect is heightened by the sense of communion that permeates the ritual sharing of holy food. Each member brings something to the meal besides his appetite, so maximum participation is affected. The food is offered to God several times, and prayers are said and chants sung before the food is eaten. (The idea underlying the offering of food to God is this: God leaves for the devotees that which He does not want for Himself, which becomes the devotees' way of proclaiming their devotion; leavings are normally "impure," but the "true devotee" eats the "leavings of the Lord.") In a sense, food is not "enjoyed"; that is, the palates of the members are kept under control. Small bites are taken, and few people ask for seconds. Normally, compliments are offered to those who prepared the food, but such compliments are nearly always responded to in the following manner: "I was not the provider of the food, but merely the instrument." To eat, but not to enjoy, then, is another kind of austerity which the members believe infuses in them the power of the divine, cleanses the body and only incidentally nourishes.

While the feast is going on, there is little talking, the members appearing preoccupied, again, with thoughts of the sacred act of eating. Afterwards, however, the feast evolves into a talking of God ceremony with the men taking their places in various parts of the "church" while the women repair to the kitchen and see to the dirty dishes.

An interesting variant on the feasting theme is found in the occasional trips that members of the inner circle make to local restaurants. Again, the idea of eating is that of purification, of communion, and of the celebration of the fruits of the divine power with which the food is charged. But since the food is prepared under dubious (i.e. non-sacred) circumstances, efforts are made to purify it, to offer it to God. Thus, the members often cause minor uproars in restaurants as they chant and pray over enchiladas or roast beef. This, of course, eliptically illustrates the fact that even outside of the parameters of their own milieu -- that is, in the presence of strangers -- the members of the sect have a tendency to carry out their spiritual quest.

Feasting and fasting, then, are important features of the sect's ethos, in the sense that they contribute to the distinctive Hindu motif which the members have over the years adopted. The typical Hindu, they rightly or wrongly believe, is, above all, continent, is neither elated over good food nor upset when there is little or nothing to eat. The fact that Indian foods, or the vegetarian theme in traditional Hindu society, are not extensively elaborated in the sect is probably due to the fact that their guru has told them that a vegetarian diet, while it is preferable, is not a prerequisite to spiritual realization. It is a fact, too, that "natural foods" are not readily available in the urban setting where the sect is situated, and, when they are available, their cost is prohibitive.

A Day of Worship

The day of worship can be differentiated from any other day only on the basis of the intensity of the religious feeling that is evoked among the members of the inner circle. In a sense, every day is a day of worship, of austerity, but on some days these two important elements in the religious frame of reference acquire a stronger valence. The conditions that produce these special times are not easy to understand, since the "chronically heightened idiosyncratic religious mood," to use Max Weber's phrase, may come at any time. Usually, though, days of worship follow days of fasting, feasting, or silence, and they sometimes follow those days which, on reflection, the members feel that the Hindu consciousness has dissipated and a more secular group feeling has evolved. During days of worship the members spend a good deal of their time absorbed in meditation or in the reading of scriptures, or, they simply look at religious pictures. The stated purpose of such activity is not unlike that of any other activity that the members engage in: Days of worship are for "crying out to the Lord," for getting oneself in spiritual order, for creating the conditions necessary for an inward spiritual experience.

Sometimes fasts, feasts, and extended periods of silence produce a profound, albeit entirely subjective, state of inner ecstacy, which calls for much analysis and interpretation on the parts of those who experience such states. Hence, when the mood of the group is elevated, whether because of some external phenomenon, like a collective activity such as fasting, or because of an internal one, such as a particularly impressive meditation, the members afterwards engage in collective soul-searching. Sometimes an entire day is spent in meditation, punctuated with periods of talking of God and the scriptures. It is on these days that religious meanings are arrived at; Selves are infused with the notion that the divine resides within, and, again, the collective purpose that the members pursue is revitalized thereby. Days of worship, then, are unplanned, but they can be predicted when attention is paid to how the devotees feel about their spiritual progress. When progress is being made, or when it has come to a standstill, a day of worship is not far off. Usually the day begins spontaneously when one or two members shows up at the siteof the church and displays a religious mood. These displays vary from individual to individual, but something can be said about their general characteristics.

That tension exists between ascetic and mystical approaches to religion and between the sacred and the secular is suggested by the fact that the members of the inner circle have cultivated a large number of gestures and postures which are designed to communicate to others a religious intention that will change the definition of a given situation.

XUM

For example, when people in the sect are engaged in normal socializing and one member wishes to invoke the symbolic authority of Hindu consciousness, he may suddenly (in full view of the others) close his eyes, clasp his hands in front of his chest, and in a loud, resonant voice sing, "Om." When the other members see and hear this, they may follow suit, but if not, then they at least cease what they are doing out of deference to the person in their midst who has suddenly been seized by a benign paroxysm of mystic religiosity. Moreover, a person may suddenly prostrate himself before the sect's main shrine with the same effect; the members then redirect their interests toward the inner-worldly, mystical realm. In the context of the present discussion concerning the day of worship, these displays of religious intention follow one another in fairly systematic fashion. Unlike the situation in pentecostal sects and cults, however, where an infectious group elation raises the pitch of religious worship to the level of expressive celebration, in the Cosmic Liberty Church, where the capacity for ecstacy is within the person rather than without, the effect is to restore a kind of nascent quietude in the situation, a quietude characterized by the members' extreme passivity.

This means that on days of worship, and, of course, on days of silence, fasting, feasting, and so on, a state of subjective near-ecstacy is induced in individual members. The atmospher, however, becomes charged with the sober restraint that each person exercises. There is little testifying beyond the occasional, spontaneous expressions of faith that serve to punctuate the extended periods of silence, chanting, and meditation. Even when talking of God takes place, the members proceed in subdued tones, and one has the feeling that nearly everyone is on the verge of tears. Thoughts are directed toward God, toward the guru, toward the various saints and seers, and, finally, toward the other members of the group as self-deification in the form of sublimated intellectual ecstacy is actively pursued, and, once achieved, sustained.

Days of worship also occur on members' birthdays, on important Hindu religious holidays, such as Krishna's birthday, Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, Sarada Devi's birthday, Vivekananda's birthday, and so on, and also on Easter Sunday and Christmas. Sometimes days of worship are spent at the Vedanta temple, where elaborate celebrations are held. When the members return to the site of the sect in Venice, however, the celebrations are continued in the same vein as described above, the important consideration always being the cultivation of an inner mystique of Hindu consciousness.

Days of worship, then, are extremely important, and, they are a fairly common occurrence. They are characterized by a good deal of improvisation, and their purpose is to re-establish the virtues of the Cosmic Liberty, to raise the Hindu consciousness of the group, and to create within the individual a capacity for ecstacy.

Sundays

Social life in the Church of the Cosmic Liberty is characterized, as we have seen, by spontaneous religious acts which elicit the participation of the members of the inner circle in a movement toward a collective inner ecstacy. On Sundays, however, spontaneity is of less importance, since the activities of the sect members are more routinized. Sundays are days of worship, feasting, hustling, grooving, celebrating, and talking of God all rolled into one.

The members attend services at the Vedanta Society in the morning. These services include a brief meditation followed by a lecture by one of the swamis. (There are, I think, four swamis at the Hollywood temple; the oldest is the sect's guru, although they admire the others and look to them for religious inspiration.) Traveling to the Vedanta Society is in itself an interesting social context in sect life. The members arrive at the home of Shivadas and Peaches (i.e. the "church") at the appointed hour and await the arrival of Fred, who usually brings one of his limousenes. While they are waiting, the devotees determine who deserves to ride in the limousene and who must ride (with the children) in someone else's automobile. Those whose spiritual progress is slow or lagging must usually take care of the children and be content to follow Fred and the chosen few at a distance. Once the trip is underway, the members talk of God, burn incense, do japa, and, before the anti-drug edict came down from on high, smoke marijuana. (The actual anti-drug edict came in the Summer, 1971; before that time, marijuana was smoked by nearly all of the Cosmic Libertarians on a daily basis.)

XUM

On arriving, the members immediately seek out the swami (i.e. their guru), the other swamis, the nuns, the monks, and the lay Vedantists they have come to know over the years. Much animated discussion of the type often heard in the sect during the talking of god rituals takes place. Then, after a few moments, they file into the temple and take their places in the front row of seats before the large altar. Normally the Cosmic Libertarians meditate in the cross-legged position on the floor with the people who are trying to become monks and nuns at Vedanta's several convents and monasteries, while most of the "other" Vedantists (who are both "straight" and adults) are content to meditate in their seats. The sectarian exclusiveness of both the Vedantists and the Cosmic Libertarians prohibits all but the most superficial inter-personal encounters from developing between the members of the two groups. However, sitting with the aspiring monks and nuns does afford the Cosmic Libertarians the sense that the Vedanta Society recognizes their sect as a sovereign religious organization -- which it doesn't; the Cosmic Libertarians are to the Vedanta Society dues-paying (sometimes) "members of the congregation" -- but the closeness to the shrine, the officiating swami, and the "real Vedantists" (i.e. the inner circle of the Hollywood temple) creates the necessary sense of exclusiveness which is a barrier to complete absorption of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty by the Vedanta Society.

When the lecture begins, the members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty hold themselves perfectly still; eyes seldom blink, no one squirms, no one swallows. Again, the point of such "self-control" is to facilitate the absorption of the vibrations emanating from the swami on the podium, to partake of his spirituality on the highest (intuitive) level. Finally, when the lecture is over and the congregation files out of the temple, each person is greeted by one or more of the swamis. Afterwards the Cosmic Libertarians describe to one another what they felt when they came near to such and such a swami, or what happened to them when they shook hands with him and he looked at them "with those Swami eyes." Thus, the trip back to the "church" in Venice is highlighted by spontaneous expressions of faith and religious conviction -- all of which, not incidentally, are directly attributed to their having had recent contact with so holy a person as a swami.

Once the members arrive in Venice they normally retreat to their various homes to meditate (or "come down,"as the case may be) and to prepare food, music, and so on for the Sunday feast. Several hours later they return to the sect and await the arrival of the members of the outer circle (only three or four members of the outer circle are Vedanta Society members as well) and any guests who might be brought along. The shrine is decorated with flowers, incense is lighted in all corners of the flat, and a general mood of sociability pervades the sect.

When the members of the outer circle arrive they are greeted by Shivadas, Fred, Peaches and Verna (the directors and their wives). Generally, some small talk takes place, and this is later transformed

XUM

into discussions of a religious nature. Finally, when the directors determine that the time is right to begin, all of those present arrange themselves pell-mell in the alcove of the shrine for the services.

Everyone bows before the shrine and chants resound throughout the room. Finally, Shivadas will pick up his guitar and begin singing religious songs. Most of the songs were composed by members of the inner circle, while others come from the Vedantist literature and have been adapted to the guitar. Everyone joins in the singing, and the mood of the group is very quickly elevated. Sometimes the singing will last for as long as an hour, but thirty minutes is the usual length of time spent. Then, Shivadas puts down his guitar and begins to sing in a drone the holy _mantra_, "Om." At this point members pick up finger cymbals, bells, or simply sing along with Shivadas. In time, the sounds die out, and the members begin their meditation. Usually the meditation lasts around an hour and is followed by a twenty minute period of silence during which members "come down" and get the blood circulating in their limbs.

After the meditation and the "decompression"period, the men immediatly begin animated discussions about God, meditation, Swami, or other important topics. Meanwhile, the women busy themselves with the preparation and purification of the food. When the table is piled high with plates of food and pitches of milk, coffee, and wine, the members serve themselves -- buffet style -- and then find a place to sit. Then one of the directors will offer the food to God (even though it has already

XUM

been offered at least twice -- first, by the person who prepared it at her home, and, second, by the women who, before the sect's kitchen shrine, say prayers over it before it is placed on the table). After either Fred or Shivadas says grace, the members say silent prayers on their own. Finally, everyone begins to eat. Not much discussion takes place during the actual eating of the prasad, and few people take seconds unless they are encouraged to do so by the women. Following the meal, the women collect the dishes and clean up the flat, while the men resume their discussion of religion among themselves. On occasion, it is at this point that the members of the outer circle are hustled, that is, cultivated so that they will think so highly of the inner circle's spiritual achievements that they leave donations in the basket on the radio cabinet as they file out some hours later.

Sundays, then, have a unique importance, not only in a social sense, but in an economic one as well, for the relationships that make it possible for the sect to survive are created as a result of the activities that take place. Moreover, the distinction between the inner circle and the outer circle is created in the discussions that ensue during Sunday activities.

An Incident at Fred's

One evening in the fall of 1970 while I was staying at the "church" a phone call came from Fred who informed us that a group meditation was about to commence at his home located a short distance away. Some of the devotees needed rides, so my wife, Linda, and I agreed to pick them

XUM

up on our way over. One of those whom we picked up was Rosemarie, the Cosmic Liberty Church's "astrologer." Rosemarie had proved to be one of the most difficult persons in the sect to get to know. Whenever I attempted to talk to her, or about her to others, I drew a blank. I did know, however, that she had come from a highly mobile military family, that her adventures in the youth culture prior to her involvement as a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and the swami had included some pretty hair-raising drug episodes, and that she had a small child as a result of having been raped while hitchhiking. But these were, and remain, rather disjointed facts. Thus, I recall the following incident with some puzzlement, but I think it will illustrate the importance of improvisation in the sect as well as offering to the reader another glimpse at the group's ethos.

When we picked up Rosemarie, she was in such good spirits that I was surprised. She had always struck me as singularly dull in comparison with the other Cosmic Libertarians who were bright, evocative, expressive. But on this particular evening Rosemarie chattered away with abandon about how the stars had that very day moved into a position that would prove most auspicious for our informal gathering. When we arrived at the meditation site, we were greeted by around ten other devotees. The mood of the group was quite elevated, and Rosemarie contributed to it by making numerous positive exclamations regarding the stars, the planetary influences, and other phenomena that astrologers are wont to discuss.

At one point in the pre-meditational procedings, Linda, who has read a few books on astrology offered a polite disagreement with one minor point that Rosemarie had made, and, quite unexpectedly, this resulted in the kind of verbal combat between the two that is more appropriate to encounter groups than to informal sect gatherings. Because astrology is officially and ritually disapproved by the Cosmic Libertarians, and the role of "church astrologer" is therefore a stigmatized one, those in attendance took the side of my wife, leaving Rosemarie alone to defend her already (more or less) indefensible position. Rosemarie's astrological leanings are utilized by the remiander of the group to bolster their own contrary ideological defenses, so her role, although bordering on the "deviant" is actually "functional" for the purposes of promoting group solidarity. And, in this situation, the group was solidly against her. After much arguing back and forth, the consensual "verdict" -- everyone somehow managed to get involved in the exchange -- seemed to be that Rosemarie had been rightfully if not righteously "shot down" because her "ego" was involved in her subject. (Shivadas was quick to point out that the ego is the enemy of the spiritual seeker, and that Rosemarie's ego had been "hooked" by Linda's off-handed remark.) This moral lesson was served up in spite of Linda's objections that she had intended to pose no threat to Rosemarie's astrological erudition.

In short order Rosemarie became her usual up-tight self, and it was obvious -- to me,at least -- that she had been emotionally shaken by the confrontation, which had started out, after all, as an innocent attempt on her part to be merely sociable. During the meditation I noticed out of the corner of my eye that Rosemarie occasionally glared at Linda and me with such "obviousness" (read, intensity) that I felt that we might somehow be the objects of a malevolent magic spell designed to do us considerable harm. She was, in other words, mad as hell about the whole thing. The "vibes" during meditation were otherwise good, however, and afterwards the setting was quite relaxed, and the participants talked and joked among themselves. Everyone appeared to be having a good time.

Everyone, that is, except Rosemarie. The wounded astrologer made sub-audible remarks about "outsiders" every time the opportunity arose. And, she continued to gaze at Linda and me in turn with a look of bewilderment, disapproval and scorn on her face. After about an hour and a half of this, Rosemarie became momentarily distracted from her "intention displays" by a string of Pomo Indian beads that I was wearing. She leaned across the table (interrupting someone else's discourse on the exemplary prophecy of Sri Ramakrishna) and told me (not altogether sincerely, I thought at the time) that she really liked the beads, that they were beautiful, and so on. I had become increasingly tense in the situation, and with an opportunity to change its definition, I was greatly relieved, although, as I said, I didn't know for sure whether I was being readied for a final, full-scale assault, or whether Rosemarie was trying to "make up." At any rate, I responded to her remarks by removing the

XUM

strand of beads from around my neck and offering it to her as a kind of gift of truce. She was very surprised and moved by this, and the entire group at once shifted its attention from talking of God to the exchange that was developing between Rosemarie and me. Her eyes filled with tears, and she carried on at length in a highly emotional manner about how "fantastic" the beads were and how "beautiful" I was for having "laid them on [her]." The rest of the evening she showed only minimal interest in the others, devoting herself instead to the admiration of me and the beads that in a moment of ambivalent desperation given her. And, she made a point of telling Linda over and over again how "wonderful" we both were and how lucky she, Linda, was for having a husband as nice as I.

The "peace offering" had an unanticipated consequence for my research that was to be felt immediately. Rosemarie became my defender and protector, and she was always respectful of Linda, several times asking Linda to explain certain astrological "facts" to her. Moreover, the incident enhanced Linda's and my status in the group, because the peace offering appeared to others to be a spontaneous show of affection, a highly prized commodity in the sect. Again, this is due to the fact that uncalculated actions that address themselves to the situation immediately at hand seem to epitomize the improvisational style of life that the members lead and which represents one of the goals of group life. The members had seen in us the character trait (however diffused) that they attempt to cultivate in each other and in themselves, so it did not matter, at least not significantly, that we were not of the group.

On the contrary, the fact that we showed a capacity for spontaneity made us one of them. On several occasions after the incident, members of the sect saw fit to recall what had transpired when I gave Rosemarie the beads. Although Rosemarie's role was generally mentioned, the important always seemed to be that I had "blown her mind" by being nice to her when I wouldn't have been expected to, given the circumstance of her hostility toward Linda and me.

In time, Rosemarie assumed her usual attitude of aloofness toward us, and when we saw her again some months later, she was hard-pressed to recall our names. (I noticed that she still wore the beads, however.)

Sect Sovereignty

In addition to the behavioral latitude that accompanies the playing of roles in special social contexts and that provides structural support for improvisation, another incentive to improvisation is the expectation that change will come. In the Church of the Cosmic Liberty change is believed to be morally good, so members try to make as many improvisations in group life as they can. These improvisations, as I have tried to demonstrate, include religious acts, money-raising schemes, variations on the identity theme, ways of "relating" to people, ways of "expressing" the glories, values, goals, virtues and self-and-not-so-self-evident truths of God, Self, Religion, Community, Being, Consciousness, Love, Youth, and so on, and finally "realizing" (by any means necessary?) that All of It has "meaning."

However, no one in the sect claims to have "realized God," nor does anyone believe that he "knows who he himself (Really and Truly) is." Although the much sought after and analyzed essential identity is never really found -- perhaps because the center of the Cosmos lies somewhere amidst the innumerable layers of the existential onion and not beneath the shattered surface of the mystic nutshell -- there are untold additional possibilities, still more unrealized truths, a seemingly endless supply of mind-blowing happenings to be related to, expressed and experienced, so one need not worry about tomorrow. Still less do the Cosmic Libertarians feel a need to worry about yesterday, about the past: As one devotee said, "The Lord's got that one covered, too." To these young religionists who have adopted -- with great impunity and an equal disregard for the inherent vanity and futility of such existential nonchalance -- the Hindu ethic that "life is continual change," life is a continual unfolding of events and things, of people and places, times and subjective states, and of the other things that we tune in on (at the expense of everything else) during our brief tenure on this planet. Change, to the Cosmic Libertarians, is the very name of the world we stand on. To resist change, they feel, is to resist the irresistable Brahman toward which solitary truth the manifold moves with unswerving certainty. Hence, the object is to live in harmony with change, to change as change demands, to fulfill the goal, whether in the present lifetime or in a "future one" of knowing God "personally, intimately, beyond doubt."

If, before their immersion in Hinduism (although they may have succeeded only in getting their feet wet because they are and remain, after all, American youths), the Cosmic Libertarians felt a need for a way of coping with continual change and with the status incongruities, feelings of alienation, and the economic uncertainties engendered by it, then Hinduism surely provided the sufficient, if not necessary, tool. To the Hindu change is inevitable, natural, good.[13] And, the Cosmic Libertarians have come to celebrate their own stylized version of Tantra and Vedanta. These are two Hindu philosophical systems which promote good-natured, affirmative -- if not actually decisive -- rejection of the world.[14] The Lebenswelt of the Cosmic Libertarians at any rate affords them the not infrequent, if undeserved (from the adult point of view), luxury of thumbing their noses at the world, that distinctly American world represented by urban Los Angeles where, the Cosmic Libertarians believe, the willful, crafty harriers of the rat race in their delusion fancy that things move at a mere snail's pace. Hinduism (in a way paralleled by no other religious-philosophical system) specifically celebrates the notion of a permanent, fundamental Self, so it was the one system that could satisfy the distinctly youthful (at least among middle class Americans) requirement for an identity of identities that would render the torrent of change navigable. As I stated in the first chapter, the problem of individual identity (and the concomitant, compelling myth that it can be found) is engendered by the social and economic requirements and tendencies of the post-industrial, capitalist system. "Of the breakup of traditional institutions" and the "related processes of narrowing scope and increasing demands,"[15] Kenneth Keniston has this to say:

XUM

> Put in oversimplified form, if the main problem of traditional community is 'socialization' or 'fitting in,' then the chief problem of our technological society is the achievement of individual identity. In a technological society, every youth is confronted with a series of distinct roles, organizations, and institutions, each of which makes different and often conflicting demands. A medieval lad might choose between priesthood and peasantry, and this single choice almost entirely defined the rest of his life: his residence, his work, his marriage, his religion, his friends, and his values. But our society offers no such 'package deals,' no prefabricated and pre-assembled adulthoods which can be donned like a suit of clothes.
>
> Nor do the organizations and institutions that have replaced in-tact community really provide an adequate substitution for it. For a very few, religion can still provide a special sense of embracing belonging and selfhood; but, for most, religion is but a Sunday meeting house and nursery school, and a recreation center, which cannot adequately define the entire person.[16]

Indeed, the Cosmic Libertarians may qualify as Keniston's "special few" who can get something out of religion that they cannot get out of work, their family, their relationships with friends, and so on, but even the Cosmic Libertarians have embraced a religion that is for the most part uninstitutionalized (at least in this country), and which does define the entire person, or at least provide the setting in which he can define himself for himself. The extension of the religious, and by implication the "communal," into every area of life, the structural support accorded individual improvisations on the shape that life is to take, and the "total institutional" atmosphere that succeeds in governing and managing the problem of identity implies the existence of a special kind of sovereignty. The Cosmic Libertarians routinely empower an all-embracing society to correct faults, reform deviations, and right the wrongs that are occasionally committed, whether willfully or unintentionally, by outsiders

XUM

and by the Cosmic Libertarians themselves. No one individual has access to this sovereignty in the sense that power is there for the taking, but individuals can and are expected to set the processes in motion which bring the sect's sovereignty to bear on a situation. The sect is a sovereign power that transcends both individual and group, and it is in the name of this transcendent sphere that improvised, spontaneous propitiations (to God, Self Hindu consciousness, and the like) are served up with ritualistic self-possession.

The improvised rituals create the mood and social character that is required for the emergence of the sect's sovereignty. Meditation convinces one, or one's Self -- in the most proverbial of terms -- of its efficacy. Worshipping and praying to any and all manner of deities settles crises, promises the satisfaction of needs and desires, opens the way for still further improvisations. That meditating, the doing of japa, worshipping, praying, feasting, fasting, rapping, and hustling all take place with near clock-work regularity (though participation in these contexts is spontaneous and the actors are inclined to change their character at will) testifies to the importance of the sect's transcendent power to accommodate or to tame the unbridled emotions, kindred fantasies, and oceanic feelings that are released through each member's participation in a unique inter-subjective realm. Within the orbit of this realm lies the moral ground on which experience is built. The members speak of it as if its familiarity were unquestioned and as if all of the Cosmic Libertarians were in basic agreement as to its nature and purpose (which they aren't). Though such agreement may

XUM

in fact be lacking, membership in the sect provides people with a ready answer to the question that may be asked by fellow-travelers in the youth culture: What are you into?

Being-in-the-world, then, the Dasein of Heidegger, amounts to a definition of human nature which has as its common denominators youthfulness, innocence, spontaneity, and proverbial sincerity, all of which are subsumed under the rubric of religion, spirituality, or "Hindu consciousness." The members, in fact, routinely describe being-in-the-world (or at least that corner of the world occupied by the sect) as a continuing unfolding of their lives which has seen no break in continuity with the past. What was once their childhood became their adolescence and is becoming their permanent youthfulness. What was once their proverbial innocence became their religiosity. What was once their curiosity became their guileless "deviance," that new social innocence. And, though they feel that they remain independent and aloof, the have found shelter (viable or not is an open question at this point) form old age, from grim adulthood, under the protective, stimulating umbrella of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty.

XUM

Footnotes to Chapter III

1. Regarding the origin of the donation basket -- At first, in the office, books and incense were "sold." Money for these things was placed in the basket. Later, when the office was abandoned, the basket was moved into Shivadas' and Peaches' home (i.e. the "church"). One may leave a token donation, say, of a dollar or two, but larger donations call for the investigation of the intent of the donor and a discussion of the donation's possible impact on the group.

2. Thus Spake Vivekananda (Mylapore, Madras: Published by the President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1969), p. 90.

3. See Swami Saradananda (trans. by Swami Jagadananda), Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master (Mylapore, Madras: Published by the President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1952).

4. This story appears in its original version in, Mahendranath Gupta (trans. by Swami Nikhilananda), The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942).

5. Max Weber's analysis of charismatic authority, on which the foregoing discussion was based, appears in, Max Weber (ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich), Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), III, pp. 1111-1157.

6. Erving Goffman, Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1961) p. 40.

7. Christopher Isherwood, Ramakrishna and His Disciples (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965). See also, Swami Saradananda, Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master.

8. Included in the "holy books" category are the following: Mahendranath Gupta, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna; Swami Saradananda, Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master; Swami Gambhirananda, Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother (Madras: B.N.K. Press, Ltd., 1955); Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (trans.), Shankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1968);

XUM

Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (trans. and commentary), How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali (New York: The New American Library, Signet Books, 1969). Other books that the Cosmic Libertarians deem important are cited in other parts of the present study.

9. Thus Spake Sri Ramakrishna (Mylapore, Madras: Published by the President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1968), p. 99.

10. Thus Spake Vivekananda (Mylapore, Madras: Published by the President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1968), p. 14.

11. Thus Spake Sri Krishna (Mylapore, Madras: Published by the President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1968), pp. 60, 64.

12. Thus Spake Sri Krishna, p. 38.

13. H. Ross Barnett, Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953), pp. 62-63.

14. Heinrich Zimmer (ed. by Joseph Campbell), Philosophies of India (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), pp. 560-576.

15. Kenneth Keniston, The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p. 250.

16. Kenneth Keniston, The Uncommitted, p. 251.

XUM

CHAPTER IV

Ideology and Social Process

The purpose of life, according to the Cosmic Liberty Church, is to "realize God." Now what does this mean? When someone says they "realize God," perhaps they are thinking of the word "god" or about a concept or a church or a creed that is important in their lives. It could be almost anything that one means. To some people God is an abstract, quasi-benign, super-being whose lack of interest in earthly happenings is equalled only by man's preoccupations with the world. To others he is a near-human being whose qualities need only be recognized and affirmed. Some see God in everything, some see Him in nothing. In some places God is mother, in others He is father, brother, mother-father, sky, earth, child. In some cultures He takes on the form of the dove, in others the cow, while in still others He is likened to a ram's horn. Realizing God does not refer to knowledge _about_ God, or knowledge _about_ religion, or even knowledge _about_ life itself. To the Cosmic Libertarians, "realizing God" refers to the direct infusion of the divine, a _vertical_ knowledge of _Self_ (i.e. God, religion, life itself).

"All beings are said to be moving toward God." "In reality there is only one reality, God." "God is perfect, inscrutible." "Man is imperfect, full of vanity, guile, and deceit. Man can only beg permission through his rituals, work, and prayers to lie at the feet of God. Man doesn't demand things from God, and he doesn't make deals." "Man cannot legitimately ask anything of God, for these would be (no matter what they are) an insult." "In prayer, ask for devotion. In prayer, ask for faith. Don't ask for toys, for these only distract one from the all-important duty in life--to realize God." And so it goes, day in and day out. "Say 'God,' realize God." "I felt Ramakrishna's presence in the altar; I felt he had come from across the sea." "I felt Holy Mother pouring milk on His feet." "I dreamed of Vivekananda meditating." "I felt the Lord standing with us in the kitchen." The strange character of the visions experienced by the adept is this: They are all passive visions. None of the Gods roar up on ethereal choppers, none of the saints espouse the law, and no one expects this to happen. "God convinced us," they say, "that this is the way. We have seen him in our eye of eyes, felt him in our heart of hearts. Do you not believe?"

The previous chapter dealt primarily with the structural and organizational features of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty. In the present section I will attempt to describe the salient features of the sect's cultural system. The members of the inner circle of the sect define the world and guide their actions along the lines of an (improvised) ideological framework. This ideological framework impinges on every situation in daily life and affects the character of socialization, the formation of religious identities, the maintenance of faith, and other basic social processes. During the four years that I studied the Church of the Cosmic Liberty I discovered that this ideological framework had four distinct components, which, although they over-lap to a considerable degree, can nevertheless (for heuristic purposes) be treated separately. These components can be called the ideology of consensuality, the hippie ideology, the ideology of the cosmic liberty, and the pan-Hindu ideology. I will describe each of these ideologies in turn and then will attempt to show how they affect certain social processes in group life.

Consensual Ideology

Several members of the inner circle have been together for at least six and possibly seven or eight years. By "together" I mean that they have lived their lives more or less in common, sharing basic concerns and activities, a world view, and have developed a strong sense of solidarity. This solidarity is at times articulated in terms of an ideology of consensuality. The directors, Fred and Shivadas and their wives, in addition to Sheryl, Rosemarie, Alice, and Tom have all said to me that they consider themselves to be a kind of extended family; that is, a group for which a special kind of kinship bond defines the solidary relationships. This sense of familial solidarity provides a kind of extra-institutional underpinning for the sect, and the members believe that no matter what may befall the Church of the Cosmic Liberty in future times, the extended family will stay together.

Shivadas told me:

> We are a true family. Well, we've been together for years. We've come to know each other in a very complete way, so it's not just a friendship

> thing. We dealt dope together, hassled with busts, with poverty, with trying to make it in life. There's a lot of trust and love that goes down between us, and this is important especially now that we're trying to realize God, because we have something to fall back on. I mean, even if all of the other members split or something or a bad scene comes down, we can still rely on each other.

Beyond this somewhat utilitarian notion of mutual self-help lies a mystical definition of the meaning of the group's consensuality. The members believe that they were placed into each other's lives by divine edict. Early in this study I reported on the way in which Shivadas and Alice met on a pier. Most of the other members can relate similar stories of their first encounters with the rest of the "family." Sheryl believes that God "directed" her to Shivadas and Peaches, although she was unaware of this divine influence at the time. Similarly, Rosemarie feels that the "good vibrations" of the group had such strong attraction that she eventually joined the family. Fred says that beyond a doubt God was acting in His "mysterious and wondrous ways" when the two directors were brought together and they organized first a dealing group and later the sect.

An important point that should be made about the feeling of solidarity that is shared by the members of the inner circle, however, is that it is not articulated in terms of its sacred character, but rather in terms of a more or less secular one. None of the members, it should be noted, defines his existence prior to contact with the group as problematic. That is, no one saw himself as "down and out." However, all seemed to be affected by changing affiliations and the dissolution of the post-adolescent peer groups they were involved in prior to the sect's founding. Rosemarie, Alice, and Tom were members of two different communes that disbanded. Sheryl had been involved in transient hippie scenes in Berkeley and Big Sur. Fred and Verna had drifted from group to group in the area where the sect is presently located, while Shivadas and Peaches likewise had been involved in a number of "scenes" the impermanent character of which had left them with few close friends and associates. Thus, when the people got together, all had a desire to develop more or less permanent relationships. Sheryl told me:

> I had been through a lot. Like I was very tired of just drifting from one scene to the next. First I was in school and, you know, most of the people there were on ego trips. Then, after I graduated, I headed for Big Sur and hung out with some very far out people who were into dope pretty heavy and into the prankster thing, you know, the Kesey trip, which I went on for a time. Then I went to Berkeley and did the street scene for a while, but when things got heavy with the Man (police), I came down here. Well, I met Shivadas and Peaches in Berkeley but we weren't all that tight, but when we came down here it was, well, different; we didn't know too many people, so we just started spending a lot of time together dealing and tripping and sort of fucking around.

The early group apparently had a lot in common. All saw themselves as vanguard members of the hippie movement, albeit as displaced, alienated young people who recognized a need for establishing relationships with others on a basis that the dominant society, they felt, would not recognize as legitimate. The consensual ideology, then, is a product of shared experiences and common affiliations. It is the basis for the group's staying together "through thick and thin," and it is the ideological foundation on which the sect as a living arrangement is based. During crises such as arguments when all appeals to scripture, to the dicta of the guru, to hipness, or to anything else fail, one can always invoke the hegemony of consensuality and remind his fellow family member that, after all, they have been together for a long time and that this should "mean something." . Such an appeal usually returns things to normal.

When the edict against the use of marijuana had come down from the swami, for example, several members of the inner circle strongly objected to what they felt was an infringement of their basic right to find the path to spiritual fulfillment that was personally satisfying (plus, a few confided, they liked to get high). They argued with some force that although the swami was indeed a "spiritual powerhouse," he mirrored the "establishment's" view of marijuana as a potentially deleterious substance. Several members attempted to counter the argument by reference to scripture, in which, they said, the idea of foregoing pleasures in the present for future rewards was clearly delineated. When this did no good (why, I'm not certain) they reminded the dissidents that, after all, in accepting the swami as their guru, they had agreed to do his bidding without hesitation. Even this did not work, for some members felt that in spiritual matters the swami was always correct, but since he did not live in the world he was sometimes mistaken about "worldly things."

The swami learned that drug use was taking place from a member of the Vedanta Society who was invited to the sect by Shivadas. Almost immediately the monk gave the inner circle an ultimatum either to give up drugs or to give up religion. At the same time Shivadas and Fred were cautioned against giving religious instruction, such as the teaching of meditation to new-comers, since these things lie within the swami's domain. The crisis that the swami's edict engendered has not been (as of this writing in 1972) fully put to rest. Some members left the group rather than give up smoking marijuana, while others, including all of the members mentioned in this study agreed to quit. I believe that the reason why these members could give up drug use in spite of its importance to the daily routine has a great deal to do with the fact that they believe that meditation produces a similar result (i.e. the state of mind known as "being high"). Shivadas told me that "meditation is better than dope, because you don't have to come down." However, "We all miss getting high with out friends," he went on to say, "And some of them don't understand why we would quit smoking dope just because our guru said to."*

---

*I have observed that since the group gave up drug use, no real change has occurred in their relations with youths who continue to smoke. When the hand-rolled cigarettes are passed around, the Cosmic Libertarians merely say, "Our guru won't let us, thank you." Thus, they have not been required to give up their drug-using acquaintances or opt out of the "drug culture" because others can perceive them as having (perhaps even temporarily) given up one "high" for another. Several members, however, decided that the no dope rule was "square," so they left the group. The break occurred when Shivadas and the others learned that some of the Cosmic Libertarians remained "secret dopers" after the group had decided to follow Swami's order. "Doping in secret," Sheryl said, "is in violation of the spirit of bhakti yoga. You cannot secretly go against your guru's word, because he knows everything and this will harm your chances for spiritual liberation."

Even an appeal on the grounds that giving up marijuana smoking would be good for the sect as a whole was met with considerable intransigence, but, finally, the dissidents were asked to think of all the times they had worked through problems together, to consider how, as a family, one person's welfare had become the immediate concern of everyone else and that they should give up marijuana simply because the others wished them to do so. It was this last appeal that worked (for some members, at least), and this demonstrates the importance of the consensual ideology.

The consensual ideology thus remains when all other ideologies are dispensed with, but, for the most part, it is an ideology that is only minimally articulated (or, as in the above example, it is articulated only in times of conflict and then only partially); that is, it is a taken-for-granted ideology that needs little elaboration. Yet, as suggested by the above example, when it is invoked it has considerable power, and, moreover, it is an ideology that both the newer members of the inner circle and the members of the outer circle greatly respect. As a member of the outer circle once said to me while we were discussing the inner circle's solidarity:

> They [inner circle members] don't talk much about how they feel toward one another, at least not around me. But I have seen how they behave. They are very respectful and thoughtful and kind. One person's problem is everybody's problem. It is as if they all have the same spiritual and moral center. There is one soul with several personalities and bodies.

The above statement clearly suggests that for the several founding members who remain (and those who have left the group occasionally

XUM

return to share the common bond that still exists between and among them) a very deep relationship has been nurtured--so deep, in fact, that a fairly invidious distinction between insiders and outsiders has been established by this group. Other members of the inner circle (late-comers, that is) aspire to full membership in the central core of remaining founders, but only rarely can become close to the others and partake of the feeling of consensuality because the solidarity of the group is nearly inpenetrable. Most of the inner circle members believe, for example, that outsiders are a threat to this consensuality,even those "outsiders" who are in fact members of the inner circle. Relationships are closely guarded, and considerable rivalry between members comes to the surface when the group's pre-sect experiences become the topic of discussion. In addition, the consensual ideology admits of a kind of elitism of experience, since the members who have been together the longest feel that they are the most adept spiritually because they have been able over a prolonged period to reap the benefits of "family" unity.

Hippie Ideology

Another important aspect of the cultural system of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty is the hippie ideology, which, not unlike the previously discussed consensual ideology, is basically secular, having had its origins in the inner circle members' experiences in the youth culture prior to their becoming involved in full-time religious pursuits. All of the members of the inner circle, including both the founders and

XUM

relative new-comers, have at one time or another defined themselves as hippies, or to be more precise, have termed their world view "hip." In the previous sections on social roles and social contexts the hippie role was defined as one which enabled the members to temporarily reduce the strain attendent upon daily religious practices by "rapping" and by otherwise simply "being hippies," (i.e. non-religious, but at the same time, not "straight"). Expressed in their ideological terms, hipness (that quality of which hippies are in possession) is a special mode of awareness which enables one to discriminate between the "real" and the "phoney." A number of writers have attempted to set forth the basic principles of hippie ideology, and instead of attempting to recreate a new interpretation here, I will use their ideas as a point of departure for the following discussion.

Simmons and Winograd in their book, It's Happening describe a hippie ethic, that of "hanging loose," which is an important feature of hip social relationships.

> As part and parcel of the importance placed on directly experiencing oneself and the world, we find that spontaneity, the ability to groove with whatever is currently happening, is a highly valued personal trait. Spontaneity enables the person to give himself up to the existential here and now without dragging along poses and hangups and without playing investment games in hopes of possible future returns. The purest example of spontaneity is the jazz musician as he stands up and blows a cascade of swinging sounds.
>
> Another facet of the hang-loose ethic is an untutored and unpretentious tolerance. Do whatever you want to as long as you don't step on other people while doing it. A girl is free to wet her pants or play with herself openly while she's up on an acid trip and no one will think less of her for it. A man can stand and stare at roadside grass blowing in the wind and no one will accuse

> him of being the village idiot. If you like something that I don't like, that's fine, that's your bag: just don't bring me down.[1]

In the Church of the Cosmic Liberty a variation on the hang-loose theme is evident. Spontaneity and tolerance are, in a sense, institutionalized to such an extent that there are seemingly few acts committed by members and non-members alike that arouse much indignation. For example, once when I was at Sheryl's house as she was preparing to meditate with a group of inner circle devotees, her two-year-old daughter began whining and pulling on a cloth that covered the household shrine. Most of the members were already in the meditating position and had begun to offer silent salutations to the divine. Suddenly, Sheryl yelled at the child: "You fucking brat, keep your goddamn hands off of this altar!" Except for me (I practically leaped out of my skin) every one remained unperturbed. I didn't notice a single flinch and, afterwards, when the meditation was over, I asked Shivadas what he thought of Sheryl's outburst.

> Oh, that . . . big deal. It's better to say what's on your mind than to try to repress it. You noticed that the baby cooled it, too, right? What I'm saying is that maybe Sheryl was really bugged, and she had to let her feelings come out. Even in meditation, I should say, especially in meditation, one shouldn't try to keep things hidden. What she did was basically honest. Maybe her shouting wasn't conducive to good spiritual vibrations, but nobody thought a thing about it; except you, that is. We believe that people should do what they have to do, and you either recognize that they're going to do it, or you find people you can be around who don't put you up-tight.

Sheryl, when I questioned her about it, was mildly apologetic, but she still thought that her response to the baby's intrusion was appropriate even under the ritual circumstances surrounding meditation.

> Well, I probably shouldn't have yelled at her, but, goddammit, that kid has to learn that she can't fuck around every time we sit down to meditate. I just have this thing, you know, and maybe its not my greatest virtue: If somebody's feet stink, I think you should either tell them you don't like it or else forget it. You can't go through life all repressed and fucked up over what you can't tolerate in others. This is where the whole world is at. That's why there's war and shit, in my opinion. Everybody has hangups they can't or won't face. I know mine, and one of them is that damn kid whining and crying all over the place when I'm trying to get it on with my spiritual life. Sometimes I think this is God's way of making me face myself.

The theme of spontaneity and tolerance extends, too, into the group's religious life as we have seen in a previous section. No act, when performed with apparent good spiritual intent, is trivial or subject to criticism. People offer flowers, pay homage to the gods depicted in posters, light incense, or simply sing Sanskrit chants whenever a desire to do so seizes them. And, the members often embrace one another when their feelings are aroused. Persons, usually new-comers who appear to be slightly unnerved at being hugged and kissed on the cheek by members of both sexes, are often accused of being "square," "up-tight," "repressed," or simply "cold." Thus, the members of the inner circle believe that spontaneity is the best approach to all situations, and, concomitantly, that contrivance is the fundamental problem that the typical person must avoid at all costs if he is to succeed in life.

This leads to another set of prescriptions which delineate proper hip comportment for the members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty. Bennett Berger, in amplifying Malcolm Cowley's 1930's treatment of the history of bohemianism, has arrived at eight basic principles that form the central tenets of contemporary hippie ideology, and which can be further discussed in the context of the present study.[2] Berger notes that Cowley in a sense anticipated the ideological thrust of the current hippie movement by making reference to the idea of salvation by the child, the idea of self expression, the idea of living for the moment, the idea of liberty, the idea of female equality, the idea of psychological maladjustment, the idea of changing place, and the idea of paganism, all of which are a part of the bohemian tradition.

The members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty indeed believe that every person is born free, but society eventually intervenes and destroys the capacity for innocence. Hence, each member is encouraged to develop his own latent, if not actually repressed, potential for self-development or expression. The idea of self-expression has an analogue in the sect in the form of the oft-said euphemism, "Do your own thing." And, of course, as has already been mentioned, the members have incorporated this idea into their religious and non-religious practices so that each feels that he can express his sentiments, whether sacred or secular, in a purely idiosyncratic fashion. Indeed, in the coming discussion of the ideology of the cosmic liberty it will be shown that doing one's own thing has taken on a special religious significance.

The idea of living for the moment has both a religious and a worldly analogue in the sect. The members (of the inner circle) aspire to live in the present and rely only on God for all that they receive in life.

They eschew rational economic principles--as one member put it, "Work is a drag, man!"--they adhere to the notion that "God-realization" may come when one least expects it (as in the Zen Buddhist sense of satori) so one had better maintain himself in a perpetual state of readiness. And, they otherwise attempt to cultivate a kind of spontaneity that gives every situation an important improvisational quality. This is, of course, closely related to the idea of liberty, which, as Berger aptly points out is "manifest in the movement to legalize marijuana, to render ecstasy respectable . . . to demonstrate the absurdity of laws against acts which harm no one, and the hypocrisy of those who insist on the enforcement of these laws."[3]

The idea of female equality can be more appropriately stated, I think, as the idea of sexual equality, in the sense that the members of the sect adopt traits that are normally ascribed to or exist in both sexes. Men as well as women may be guileless, and, by the same token, women may use coarse language, smoke, and otherwise be aggressive. Men may content themselves with offering flowers, primping their long tresses, and submerging their masculinity in an oceanic posture of gentleness. In terms of dress, moreover, men as well as women wear beads, flowers, bells, colorful clothing, as well as the ever-present gold emblem emblazoned with the word "Om" in Sanskrit. As I have said elsewhere, however, what is regarded as traditional women's work, and by implication, a man's work is the same, more or less, in the sect as it is in the larger society.

The idea of psychological maladjustment, Berger points out, was not fully elaborated by Cowley, although the latter had hit upon the notion of mind-expansion as a means to alleviate society's "repression" of the individual. The sect members' use of drugs, their concern for yoga (of the bhakti devotional variety which will be discussed later on) and their constant striving for a special kind of awareness that will enable them to directly experience the power of the divine, are all seen as "means of transcending the realities that hang one up."[4]

The idea of changing place involves the hippies in a great deal of traveling to the next "scene" down the road or on another continent that is likely to be some sort of earthly paradise. In the Church of the Cosmic Liberty, however, since the members have established themselves in a fairly permanent setting, the idea of changing place does not seem to have much significance. It should be mentioned, though, that at an early point in the sect's history when funds were regularly coming in as a result of "donations" and marijuana sales, the idea of sending deserving members on "pilgrimages" to the Holy Lands (i.e. to Jerusalem and to India) was carried out at least twice . Other members have taken "vacations" in Mexico, Northern California, and the East Coast where they meditated and carried on religious business as usual. Still, travel is discouraged, or at least not encouraged, because the members believe that their own familiar surroundings are the most conducive to religious pursuits.

Finally, Berger mentions Cowley's point about the idea of paganism--"The body is a temple of adornment in which there is nothing unclean, a shrine to be adorned for the ritual of love."[5] The overt sexuality of the young, Berger says, "is manifest in the overpowering eroticism that their scene exudes: the prevalence of female flesh . . . male symbols of strength . . . the gentler and more restrained versions of these, or the by now hardly controversial assumption that fucking will help set you free."[6] I have already mentioned the sect's belief in asceticism as a tool of spiritual liberation, so these comments might appear to be somewhat contradictory. Indeed, in another work, The Making of a Counter Culture by Theodore Roszak, the point is made that the ecstatic young avoid ascetic disciplines at all costs and embrace instead the "highly sexed flavor" of contemporary, Western Orientalism.[7] But I am not convinced that asceticism must come at the expense of eros, and vice versa. Rather--and I am basing this opinion, again, on observations of the members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty--there can exist in one setting a large dose of both, without raising in the participants' minds (apparently) the notion that anything is existentially or epistomologically amiss when one gets stoned and makes love in the evening after a day of meditation. Suffice it to say that the members of the sect, particularly those in the inner circle, combine their asceticism with their sexuality and see both as having nearly equal importance for the individual.

Thus, in the sect hippie dress, hippie language, hippie comportment and demeanor all have their place, and most members see becoming hip as a kind of spiritual exercise that will do some good even if meditation and the like do not. This is not to say that hipness is spirituality seen from a different (secular) point of view, but rather that hipness, not unlike spirituality, knows no bounds, that the benefits to be derived from it are of an ultimate sort, are limitless. And, again, the hippie ideology functions as an additional buffer against the outside world and provides the members with a kind of secondary line of defense against being co-opted by the middle class which is eschewed with much eloquent testimony.

Cosmic Liberty Ideology

The third, and least-articulated ideology, is that of the cosmic liberty. No doubt this ideology stems from the aforementioned ideas of liberty and psychological maladjustment that form a part of hippie ideology. The members believe that the cosmos is governed by principles, the foremost of which,--that is, the most basic--is that of an all encompassing liberty. The cosmic liberty can be seen, moreover, as an extension into the sacred realm of the idea of doing one's own thing. To do one's own thing does not simply mean "anything" in this latter sense, however, but rather refers to the doing of a "spiritual thing" that will put one in line for some sort of divine dispensation. The ideology of the cosmic liberty is the basis for the sect as a religious entity; that is, all of the ~~principles~~ articulated by the members in their spiritual quest rest upon the assumption that in the cosmos one is in reality free to find God--to realize Him--in any way that one can, no matter what circumstances he may find himself in. By implication this means that all religions are true, that all forms of worship are equally viable (providing, of course that the worshipper is sincere), and that there is no limit to this (cosmic) resource.

When the sect was originally founded, the members used the ideology of the cosmic liberty as a lever which would enable them to rid themselves of their deviant identities (ascribed to them by the police and, they felt, by the society at large) and thereby justify dealing on transcendent principles. The ideology, in other words, transcended not only civil law, but the Protestant ethic(s) on which that law is based. Such a transcendental ideology provided for the transformation of the world, first in the sense that the group had a new credo, and, second, in the sense that a way of life could be actively lived. The cosmic liberty was believed to permeate all things--note, for instance the reference to the force that "drives the gypsy in his wanderings and the priest in his prayers" in the pamphlet that the group published--and the object of the sect and of the style of life which it supported was to put the members in harmony with this divine principle.

For a time, before the group became more sophisticated in their ideological development, the cosmic liberty was the mainstay, together with the hippie and consensual ideologies, of the sect's cultural system. It was broad enough and immutable enough to allow for the absorption of both the alien and the familiar. The members often spoke of the cosmic liberty being made manifest in art, in music, and in the less important (i.e. mundane) but nevertheless extant, aspects of daily life. Much discussion followed trips to the store or beach, for instance, and these discussions invariably involved the determination of just how the cosmic liberty was evident in this or that phenomenon.

However, as the group found new religious ideas, particularly those associated with the yogic techniques of the Self Realization Fellowship (SRF), the Students' International Meditation Society (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's group), and the Vedanta Society (of which they are now members, as well as being disciples of the head Swami), they began to de-emphasize the cosmic liberty or at least recognize that it was but one transcendent principle among many.

Pan-Hindu Ideology

In previous sections mention was made of the fact that the members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty actively strive toward the attainment of what they term "Hindu consciousness." From time to time (when the social context is deemed appropriate) they play the roles of Hindu father, Hindu mother, Hindu friend, guru, disciple, devotee, and so on. For them, Hinduism (as they interpret it) is the apex of religiosity. In a sense, furthermore, they see themselves as geographically displaced Hindus, since they feel that their legitimate socio-cultural ties, are to be found in the Indian sub-continent. All things Indian, they claim, are in reality their own. Whatever happens in India has a spiritual impact on them, and, conversely, whatever they do in their spiritual lives affects Indian culture, in the sense that by their example, Westerners will become more appreciative of the spiritual greatness of India. The fact that the members' shrines apparently resemble those found in middle class Hindu homes in India, that they adorn their walls with pictures depicting scenes from Hindu mythology, that they use Indian beads in their meditations, eat Indian food (occasionally), listen to Indian music, read Hindu literature, cover their windows and beds with Indian cloth, greet each other in Bengali fashion with head bowed and hands clasped, are disciples of a Hindu monk (the swami), discuss obscure theological points gleaned from the scriptures and modern Indian hagiographa, and speak (when they are so inclined) in the deliberately dispassionate tones of the Yogi adepts, testifies not only to their alienation from the traditional Western socio-cultural complex, but to the importance of a pan-Hindu ideology on which all of these actions, manners, and concerns are based. Because of the magnitude of this ideology, I will present here only its fundamental characteristics.

The origins of the pan-Hindu ideology are to be found in the members' participation in various hippie milieux in which Eastern ideas gained a certain amount of ascendancy due to the parallels which the participants believed existed between drug-induced experiences and the exalted spiritual states described in the classical Hindu, Taoist, and Buddhist literature. The members have told me that in all of these milieux an emphasis was placed on the interpretive powers of the I Ching, an ancient Chinese book of oracles, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Upanishads, and various other esoteric works. The importance of this, I believe, lies in the fact that in taking psychedelic drugs the participants sought a special kind of knowledge that had little bearing on their previous experience. Again, the main characteristic of this knowledge is that it is vertical; that is, direct knowledge of something, as opposed to knowledge about something, (usually the Self). The ideas contained in the above texts apparently lent a degree of familiarity to what was being experienced in drug trips and facilitated the development of meanings. The I Ching was used, for instance, to relate basic daily concerns to a cosmic order, while the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Upanishads, and other books, such as the Bhagavad Gita, were seen as maps that charted the path of the individual's consciousness in its movement toward a kind of ultimate reality that was theretofore unknowable.[8]

In every hippie milieu that I have observed, moreover, a certain number of Indian and Chinese artifacts can be found. In particular, I have in mind cloth, beads, ikons, musical instruments like the sitar and tabla, cuisine, and so on. And, many hippie pads are without chairs and couches, the denizens of these places being content to sit cross-legged on the floor. The use of marijuana and hashish, too, is seen by some hippies as being in line with Eastern cultural perogatives. Furthermore, it can be stated that the bohemian fascination with the East has a long tradition. Anisette sippers in the twenties felt an affinity with the Indian yogis, just as the peyote eating bohemians of the forties and fifties likened their subjective states of consciousness with what Zen masters experienced in satori. Parlor religionists in the eastern part of the United States gave Swami Vivekananda a warm welcome at the turn of the century, and in the sixties rock musicians and their fans catapaulted Indian sitarists and yogis to fame.[9] In this climate and from the ideas associated with it, then, can be traced the origins of the Cosmic Liberty Church's adoption of numerous Hindu ideas and cultural practices.

I can speak about this only in the most general of terms, however, because there were no specific events or crises which led the members directly to Hinduism.[10] It can be stated, however, that when the members of the sect began to see psychedelic drugs as religious sacraments they sought supportive ideas (of the Self) in the Hindu literature. The taking of drugs involved, they believed, a gradual unfolding of their "true natures," an unfolding which is the subject of most Hindu theology.[11] At first the members were content to rely on readily available information, but when they were threatened by the prospect of being arrested for drug use and drug dealing, they began to seek out teachers who would uphold (albeit only implicitly) their virtuous claims to be emissaries of the divine and purveyors of a beneficial sacrament; namely, marijuana.

The founding group consulted all manner of gurus, devotees, and charismatic leaders who could be found in California. As was previously mentioned, they were initiated into yogic meditation by followers of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the guru of the Beatles, the Beach Boys, Mia Farrow, and other show business personalities. In addition, they sought out members of the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) of which Yogananda, a Twentieth Century Indian Yogi, was the founder. (One of the members of the dealing group actually became a monk in the SRF.)[12]

These early contacts with religious personalities and belief systems were, perhaps, unsatisfying for the group at large, however, for they continued their search for a religious affiliation that would accomodate their hippie outlook, their sense of kinship for one another, and the developing transcendent ideology of the cosmic liberty. The group met and befriended a man in 1967 whose claim to be a medium of an "ancient Egyptian god," Yadda, greatly impressed them. (Eventually the man moved into Fred and Verna's house where he stayed until his death in 1969.) There is reason to believe that Yadda's impact on the group was tremendous for the following reasons. The medium was in every sense of the term an ordinary man who had cultivated (inspite of everything) what the members believed were spiritual powers. His forté was to begin speaking about religion and then slowly give himself over to "Yadda" who would then address the group through him. Although I did not personally meet the medium, I was allowed to listen to several tape recordings which ostensibly featured the voice of the mortal gradually becoming the voice of the "immortal Yadda." Yadda's message to the group was basically this: Continue the religious quest while all the time recognizing that the God of the universe is the God that is within each person. Yadda's was a doctrine, in other words, of mystical, universal love, and this formulation by definition was to limit the sect members' quest for the "true religion" to Hinduism and its numerous offshoots.

By the time that the medium died the members of the sect had already

XUM

discovered the Vedanta Society of Southern California and were coming to define the leader of that church as their own guru. In time, the members underwent initiation into bhakti yoga and accepted Sri Ramakrishna and his spiritual wife, Sarada Devi (or Holy Mother), as their chosen ideals; that is, as gods with form who would lead them to the ultimate reality, Brahman. This gradual acceptance of Vedantist interpretations and of the guru and Ramakrishna was accompanied by the development of a pan-Hindu ideology which was designed to sanctify sect life and give it day-to-day viability. Advaita Vedanta is the most common (in India) of the six branches of Hinduism. The word "Vedanta" means, in Sanskrit, the end of the Vedas, which is a reference to the Upanishads, the Bhakti and Brahma Sutras, the Mahabarata, and various philosophical systematizations of these works. Advaita Vedanta is a monist (non-dualistic) system which upholds the view that there is only one reality, Brahman, which is formless, inscrutable, and which cannot be described, defined, or otherwise comprehended.[13] Vedanta's principle proponents in this country are the swamis of the Ramakrishna Order of India who are the disciples of the original disciples of Ramakrishna, the 19th Century "incarnation of God" whose doctrine upheld the "truths of all religions." (Books about Ramakrishna describe his having worshipped like a Christian and a Muslim during which periods he had visions of Jesus and the Islamic prophet, thus "proving" that, like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam were "true religions.")[14] The Ramakrishna Order from its headquarters in India ministers to people through the Vedanta Societies which are found throughout the Western World.[15]

The contemporary Vedantist philosophy is intellectually oriented, and all of the swamis appear to be scholars of considerable erudition. The swami of whom the members of the Cosmic Liberty Church have become disciples, for instance, is the author of many books ranging from translations of Hindu scriptures to works on the parallels between Christianity and Hinduism.[16] And, this particular swami is, according to some Vedantists, the most spiritually advanced Hindu in the world. In general he upholds traditional Vedantist ideas about the ritual value of work. That is, work in the world is seen by him as something that is rewarded by God. In addition, however, he defines the world as "unreal," as maya, and all empirical phenomena as lila, or divine sport. His principle duties are to interpret happenings in the life of Ramakrishna to his disciples and make them applicable to their daily lives. According to the members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty, the swami has around five hundred active disciples who "sit at his feet" as often as he allows in order to partake of his wisdom.

The members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty are not strict Vedantists, but rather see themselves as devotees of Ramakrishna and disciples of the swami. They worship Ramakrishna's picture, pray to him, silently repeat his various secret names, and make offerings to him, his wife, his devotees and disciples. Vedanta, they claim, prepares one for a life of religious austerieties and provides the vehicle, faith, which most Vedantists recognize as the principle manner in which one can attain mystic union with the divine. For the members of the sect, faith or devotion (bhakti yoga) and Vedanta are practically synonomous, in the sense that both are means to the same end; when one uses the Vedantic means one is necessarily a bhakti yogi, and vice versa.

The talking of God ritual described earlier invariably involves group discussions of the life of Ramakrishna--not only his life, which is filled with mystical experiences and testimonies of his tremendous charisma and divine love, but his life as it "appears in the present." That is, Ramakrishna is seen as a living god, not a man who, before he died, was believed to be "god-like" or the "son of god." He was, and is, God Himself, who has taken on a mortal form in order to guide the devotees to ultimate spiritual fulfillment (i.e. God-realization). The members of the sect identify with Ramakrishna in order to be inseparable from Him, not to become merely like Him, but to become Him, God Himself. This is the purpose of meditation, of japa, of ritual prayer and offerings--to become inseparable from God by concentrating on His (Ramakrishna's) form.

Pan-Hindu ideology in the sect hold that all humans are basically divine, but some are more aware of this than others. So long as the mind ascribes to ordinary perceived phenomena the slightest bit of reality, then one's own divine nature is obscured. The purpose of life, as stated in the sect's early pamphlet, is to discover the invisible order behind all (apparent) reality, and this purpose is carried out in the conscious design of social life, indeed, in the very ecology, of the sect. Pictures, shrines, curtains of paisley print, incense, rituals, and so on are intended to bombard the individual's consciousness with the fact of its own divine origins and nature. Members address themselves to idols and ikons as if they were living things. Pictures that adorn the walls in the sect's main worship room are said to have a spirit that can be and have been occasionally evoked. Everything, from the most trivial to the most profound, is said to be infused with God's (or Ramakrishna's) grace, wisdom, beauty, and truth. The sum total of this is, as I have already pointed out, Hindu consciousness, a combined state of mind and fact of life that identifies Brahman (or its supra-human manifestations, Ramakrishna, Buddha, Jesus, Swami, Holy Mother, Shiva, Krishna, Vishnu, Brahma,man, woman, child, and so on) in everything. It might be appropriate to mention that in the course of carrying out this research project, I made several trips with the sect members to the Vedanta Society and became gradually convinced that my subjects were quite different from the "typical" Vedantists in a number of important respects. Few of the other members were young, or, if they were young, they could not be called "hippies" or unconventional youth. And, most people in attendance seemed to me to be Sunday church-goers, and, hence, in line with a typically Christian religious norm. Third, most were quite reserved, in contrast to the Cosmic Libertarians who remained their animated ecstatic selves even when in the company of the sober swamis. Thus, when Theodore Roszak in _The Making of the Counter Culture_ speaks of the lack of appeal of the stern and sober Vedanta among contemporary youth (i.e. hippies) he he is probably correct.[17] Hippies do not seek out the swamis in any great numbers, and, if they do, their interest wans when they learn about the austerieties that the Vedantist is required to perform before any spiritual benefits can be accrued. However, the members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty have managed (albeit with occasional difficulty) to straddle the "line of demarcation" that separates Hindu sobriety from hippie "trips" without abandoning their "youthful" Weltanchauung or putting the swamis up-tight.

A further word is in order concerning the obvious parallel between ritual in religion and the social use of drugs which, as I have stated, is important if one is to understand the sect members' behavior. Members routinely describe meditation as another way of "getting high," ritual as a means of "staying high" once one has become high, and prayer as a kind of primordial recognition that being high is where it (reality) is at. During the twenty weeks (over a four year period) that I spent with the group, I observed the diminution in importance of drugs *per se*, while the meaning of the drug-induced experience continued to occupy an important place in sect ideology. Even though the swami ultimately demanded that the Cosmic Libertarians desist from using drugs when he learned that it was taking place, the idea that drugs hold miraculous powers of a quasi-spiritual transcendent sort has not altogether disappeared. In fact, Shivadas, and his view may be representative, described his own use of marijuana as a preparation for his present leading of the spiritual life because it required "discipline" to smoke

XUM

as much dope as he smoked and still manage to carry on his daily affairs. I should here emphasize the point that Vedanta as a philosophy and the Vedanta Societies explicitly prohibit the use of drugs except for medical reasons. ("Getting high," which is seen by the sect as "therapeutic" does not qualify, according to Vedantic teachers, as a medical reason.) The point that I am trying to make is that in the minds of the members of the sect, drug use and religious devotion, like Vedantic principles and pietism (bhakti, or devotional, yoga) are synonymous, or nearly so, although drugs are no longer used by the group. That members could feel they were abiding by their guru's word while using drugs, even though they knew that he would sternly disapprove of the behavior if he were aware of it, testifies to the synergic viability of the pan-Hindu ideology for which all things are equally "unreal" when viewed from the sect's improvised, neo-Vedantic perspective. One point that Max Weber made about Hinduism in general is applicable in this context: Hinduism, he said, proved to be salient and powerful in the face of extreme threats posed to it by invading peoples and their cultures precisely because all things familiar as well as most things alien could be subsumed under its all-encompassing rubric.[18] In the sect this notion has a similarly important analogue: Nothing, especially what seemed to me to be obvious contradictions and discrepancies, appeared to have the power to unseat the basic convictions of the people or the premises upon which these convictions rested. People could use drugs and still partake of the swami's wisdom, just as they could apply for and eventually receive welfare assistance in spite of the fact that this implied dependency on the straight society. In short, whenever contradictions arise, they can be easily dispensed with by the pan-Hindu ideology: To the members nothing really matters, after all, because there is only one reality, Brahman, and all seek Brahman in their own way.

The clue to the sociological understanding of this lies in the members' conception of faith. Faith (of this inductive sort) must be implicit, which means that it is not subject to question. Faith provides the medium through which all manner of reality is interpreted. The devotee must love the god in himself and in others, and he actively seeks understanding of the ways in which divine wisdom is brought to bear in every situation. Faith, involves a kind of self-discipline. In its most formal manifestation, faith is expressed in the bhakti yogis' disciplined, ecstatic meditations, the technique of which has been learned from the guru. In less formal terms, however, faith is an attitude that calls upon the devotee to be detached from the good and the bad. Although other paths to God are recognized by the members of the sect as being legitimate, such as the path of knowledge (jnana yoga), the path of psychological awareness (raja yoga), the path of work (karma yoga), and so on, the members believe that bhakti yoga is the highest, since "all of the world's teachers have taught bhakti yoga in one form or another."[19] The members believe, for example, that Jesus was a great bhakti teacher, who, in saying "I and my father are one," upheld the "timeless truths of the Upanishads." Buddha, too, although his gospel was more gnostic, taught bhakti principles.

Finally, Ramakrishna is the modern exemplary prophet whose message likewise was one of faith:

> Do you know how intense our love of God should be? The love that a devoted wife bears for her beloved husband, the attachment that a miser feels for his hoarded wealth, and the clinging desire that the worldly-minded foster for the things of the world--when the intensity of your heart's longing for the Lord is equal to the sum of these three, then you will attain Him.[20]

It must be emphasized that Ramakrishna was no ordinary saint, if any saint can be said to be ordinary. His life, according to Mahatma Gandhi, "enables us to see God face to face."[21] Indeed, all thing writings on the life of Sri Ramakrishna testify to his exemplary stature as a religionist. He was, throughout his life, prone to mystic visions, ecstatic trances, and was hard-pressed to maintain a distinction between the mystical and material realms. He was at an early age given to the idea that he must realize God or perish in the attempt. He performed austerities that made many sober-minded spiritual seekers cringe, sometimes going without water and food for extended periods, as well as not sleeping for days, even weeks, at a time. What is sociologically interesting about all of this besides the obvious fact of Ramakrishna's revoluntionary charisma is that much of his life is well-documented and described in detail. The two principle works that the sect members constantly refer to are The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, and Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master.[22] Each of these works was compiled by a disciple of Ramakrishna's, and they have become modern religious classics in the time (since 1942) that they have been available in English. The members of the sect have committed

XUM

to memory many stories about as well as the teachings of Ramakrishna, and great pains are often taken to bring some issue, whether trivial or otherwise, to bear on the Master's life and teachings. All of these issues underscore the importance of faith and help to reinforce it.

Ramakrishna's message was based on non-rational principles, which greatly reinforces the sect member's convictions that "vertical" knowledge is the only legitimate knowledge. And, Ramakrishna's view that all religions were similarly striving for the same goal, namely, God-realization, supports the aforementioned ideology of the cosmic liberty while at the same time validating some of the ideas which the members held (and, to a degree, still hold) as hippies. In a sense, Ramakrishna is seen as the "supreme hippie," because he was for a while thought to be crazy, weird, and otherwise far out by the Brahmins, religionists, and others who came into contact with him. But in the end, he proved that by committing oneself wholeheartedly to finding the source of all being, the ultimate Truth would out: For Ramakrishna, this meant that he was seen as a modern incarnation of the deities, Rama and Krishna, while for the members of the sect, this means that they can likewise affirm whatever divinity resides within themselves.

The affirmation of this divinity is believed by the members to be a direct function of the austerities that one successfully performs. By austerities the members mean abstinance from sexual intercourse, occasional avoidance of food, being silent for a period of time, and foregoing small pleasures such as trips into the city, to the beach or to the mountains, the purchasing of religious artifacts, special foods, new clothing, and so on. These constitute primary austerities in that they produce a direct result; namely, a heightened spiritual consciousness when they are carried out, and, of course, a reinforcement of the meaning of bhakti (supreme devotion). An additional class of austerities can be called secondary, since these indirectly lead to the heightened subjective state of inner, ecstatic awareness of Self. In this latter category would be subsumed all manner of activities that constitute the over-all life style of the group, such as the rejection of conventional career paterns and conventional roles, the assumption of the status of marginal person or outsider (vis à vis the larger society), and the nurturance of a religious identity. "Living in the world" (even in a sect that is apart from the world) is classified as an austerity because "it is difficult," the world (i.e. the society) being "secular, impersonal, and inhumane." By implication, it can be seen that the role of hippie is a kind of austerity, which further suggests a way in which the hippie ideology complements the pan-Hindu ideology and how the latter tends to ascend over the former. By and large, though, hippie ideology is secular, while the pan-Hindu ideology is sacred. The former, in a sense, leads to the latter, the members feel, by providing the basis for the performance of austerities in the first place. In other words, when one adopts unconventional behavior as a means of relating to the world, he trades off one set of opportunities for another. The members recognize this and celebrate it by infusing it with religious meaning.

The pan-Hindu ideology thus gives the sect its gnostic, introversionist and pietistic character. I have pointed out elsewhere (in the discussion of leadership) that authority is in large part a function of one's ability to apply to everyday situations what one has learned from the study of the Vedanta and the life and teachings of Ramakrishna and his disciples. The pan-Hindu ideology, in addition to having a quasi-rational element, is also non-rational, for it is the source of whatever vertical knowledge they feel they possess. Too, the pan-Hindu ideology has an ascetic element, which in addition to providing the framework for both quasi- and non-rational forms of knowledge, gives social life in the sect an introversionist valence. Since all things are either un-real or else charged with divine power, there is no need to convert others. The members feel that outsiders will either be sent to the group by divine intervention, or else they will be kept away. Thus, the members are content to pray, meditate, and perform austerities. They convert this into gnostic principles of an inner-directed sort, and the outcome is a kind of implicit faith, a faith that is directed toward the Self and towards the group as a whole, both considered as "forms of God." Sheryl said:

> We try to see God in everything. God is in that lamp, in that poster, in the incense. The air you breathe is God, and so is the food you eat and the water you drink. We are all trying to maintain this attitude twenty-four hours a day.

In order to do this, the members believe, the individual must keep the company of the "holy," by which is meant other devotees of Ramakrishna, or some other Hindu saint, sage, seer, or god. This is a point that cannot be underemphasized, for it has considerable consequences as far as the sect members' relations with outsiders are concerned. Most have friends outside the sect, but these friendships seem at best casual. Few of the members attempt to convert their outsider friends and acquaintances, but rely instead on the outsider's being aroused by the devotee's mannerisms and spiritual preoccupations, as well as the content of his speech. Relations with neighbors are a case in point. The observations I made in this area were not particularly extensive, but a few brief statements are in order. All of the devotees, it has been said, live apart from the central gathering place (i.e. the "church"), so this necessarily means that they must be in intermittent contact with non-believers, some of whom are acquaintances and some of whom are strangers. Nearly everyone who is encountered on the outside is at some point confronted by the fact of the sect members' unconventionality. In the first place, the sect members wear articles (Indian beads, Indian clothing, and religious symbols) that identify them as a nominally deviant people. To most outsiders, the members would be placed into the category of "hippie" or "freak." To the neighbors, however, the members are seen simply as persons of a particular religious stripe. Some of the neighbors apparently approve and are generally supportive of the sect members' religious roles and identities while others are less approving and supportive. Several hippies in the area who are Sheryl's neighbors, for example, are greatly intrigued by her religious convictions which she has from time to time discussed with them. Others, though, regard her with suspicion and often tease her or otherwise attempt to get her riled up with displays of their own

"Worldliness."

The quality of the attitude of sect members toward outsiders is conveyed by the following incident: In the fall of 1970 I went to an airport customs office with Shivadas to retrieve some posters that had arrived from India. The customs official was somewhat suspicious of the size of the parcels the posters were in, and he self-righteously informed us about the laws prohibiting the importation of hashish and marijuana. Shivadas was, to say the least, greatly insulted, and an argument ensued with the customs official. The latter claimed that he was merely doing his job, while Shivadas was adamant in pointing out that the agent was in fact "harrassing us above and beyond the call of duty." Finally, the customs agent opened one of the large crates and found, to his obvious disappointment, that it did indeed contain several hundred posters depicting scenes from Hindu mythology. Then, the agent informed us that we would have to pay a special import duty, since the posters were "obviously" intended for sale. Shivadas was, by this time, furious.

"I am a minister and director of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty, friend," Shivadas said, "And these 'posters,' as you have incorrectly termed them, are part of our religious services."

The customs agent, who had retrieved a picture of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, was eyeing it with a look of stern disapproval on his face. "You mean you guys worship this crazy thing?" he said.

"Yes," replied Shivadas caustically, "And we also run around naked and howl at the moon, so you see, these aren't subject to any import tax."

XUM

"Yeah, maybe so, but how come you got nine-hundred of 'em? You gonna sell 'em, maybe?"

"No, we hang them on the wall."

"All nine-hundred of the things?"

"We have big walls."

"How big is this Cosmic Church, anyway?" asked the agent.

"Big enough," was Shivadas' reply.

"Well, you guys can do whatever you want; go naked, worship elephants, or kangaroos, or any other goddamn thing, but you gotta pay twelve dollars import duty."

When Shivadas got his checkbook out, the agent told him that he usually didn't take checks, especially from groups that nobody ever heard of, so I was asked to donate six dollars to the cause of liberating the posters from the customs office.

After the tax had been paid, the agent was trying to make friendly chit-chat over how strange it was to him that people "actually worshipped elephants."

Shivadas said to him: "You know there's something real nice about Hindus . . ."

"What's that?" asked the agent.

"They don't make fun of other people's religion."

I saw the agent's face turn red as we left his office, posters in hand.

Shivadas' defensive posture was drawn from a repository of games and responses that are used by the members to "cool out" those who in some way

XUM

or another show their disapproval of the sect's religious ways, and, I think, this eliptically illustrates the fact that the pan-Hindu ideology is applicable both within and without the sect.[23] The response itself was, moreover, an index of Shivadas', diffuse hostility to conventional authority, a hostility that is more or less shared by the other members of the inner circle as well.

In summary, the pan-Hindu ideology is basically gnostic, introversionist, and pietistic. It provides the members with a Weltanchauung which enables them to conduct their religious and non-religious activities and to protect themselves from outsiders who may disapprove. Like the previously discussed ideologies it is largely improvised, although it draws heavily on the Hindu literature. In the discussion that follows, I intend to show how all of these separate ideological features of the sect's cultural system contribute to the functioning of basic social processes that reinforce the structure and organization of sect life and create the conditions for the emergence of a special mentality.

Ideology and the Inter-Subjective Realm

In the preceding pages I have presented the essential features of the sect's ideological framework. Using this framework as a behavioral and intellectual guideline, the members of the sect attempt to cultivate and maintain within themselves an arbitrarily subjective state of mind which they term "Hindu consciousness." Hindu consciousness can be described as the sum total of vertical knowledge that one has acquired in spiritual

XUM

practices and ritual devotion and can apply to daily life. But because it is entirely subjective it has a problematic character. The world of the sect member is, after all, an intensely inter-subjective one, and this is a fact that in the final outcome displaces the importance of personal biography. Though the member's thoughts, beliefs, aspirations, and experiences of Self are his own, in the main they are mediated by his relationships with others in the sect. To a greater or lesser degree, then, the value and meaning of one's experiences in the sacred as well as the secular realms are determined by the extent to which others find them valuable and meaningful. It is on this level of inter-personal, or inter-subjective, encounters that the functions of the ideological framework can be clearly elucidated.

The members of the sect in their own words are engaged in working out a "personal relationship with God; together, yet each in his own way." This involves, at various times, and under a variety of circumstances, the cultivation and maintenance of a specialized inner-subjectivity, which, in order to stay within the stated and implied purposes of the religious life, must be shared with others. By definition, that which is entirely personal or subjective cannot be communicated to others, because once another shares one's state of mind, it is no longer subjective, it's intimacy with one's own sense of being is lost. Considerable tension exists between the personal and the social because of this, and the ideological framework provides the means by which this tension becomes manageable. Indeed, the process of managing tensions is itself a feature of the desired

XUM

"Hindu consciousness," since the one who has acquired this desired state of inner subjectivity always has the sect ideologies at his immediate disposal and can improvise as he sees fit.

It might be useful to examine the tension that is inherent in a sect member's attempting to maintain an implicit faith in God. Such faith can be demonstrated on any number of occasions, such as during meditation, while doing japa, in the talking of God ceremonies, and in the midst of day-to-day encounters with other members when a devotee suddenly bows before the shrine and offers a prayer or stick of incense to the divine. Still, such demonstrations are not necessarily convincing to others, who may believe that a member is "putting them on." All of the members acknowledge this problem as a crucial one. On the one hand, each routinely tries to provide an example for others by "religiously" performing his or her duties as defined by the guru, but, on the other hand, if one consciously performs for others and his actions are perceived as such, then he is subject to criticism. (A recognized performance is a bad performance.) This is where ideology comes in. The intent of one's actions becomes the object of the ensuing ideological examination by himself and others. In other words, such examinations amount to an on-going (verbal) analysis of each situation, each subjectively experienced state of mind, and each encounter with others, all within the parameters of the ideological framework. Each ideology--or rather, each ideological component of the overall cultural system--serves to restore the implicit character of faith when it becomes the object of scrutiny or criticism.

And, since implicit faith is equated with what the members term "natural," one cannot become overly defensive, since this is a manifestation of "bad faith." (Bad faith, of course, denotes questionable, or, downright _bad_ character.)

The on-going process of evaluation that accompanies these character-displays of implicit faith ultimately defines each member's _mode of participation_ (i.e. not only the role but the _style_ of its performance) in the religious milieu. And, of course, it is on the basis of one's mode of participation that he acquires an identity _vis à vis_ the others in the sect. Shivadas, for instance, is known as a great devotee, an instrument of the divine, because his command of the pan-Hindu ideology is considerable. He often sits before the shrine and talks aloud about what he has learned from the life and teachings of Ramakrishna, as though some god or other was communing with him. Sheryl, on the other hand, had a slightly different identity which befits her perceived maleable character. She finds leading a religious life most difficult because she often testifies to the fact that some of the spiritual subtleties alluded to in the scriptures are difficult to apply to every-day life. For example, when she finds "being honest for a day" difficult, she will say so, and this brand of honesty, the other members are quick to point out, makes her a "basically good soul." Fred, owing to his forceful personality and his elocutionary élan, is seen as a demanding devotee. He is a strict "fundamentalist" in the sense that he allows no hedging on matters that he believes are of paramount importance in the _Upanishads_. He makes constant allusions to the ways in which he and the others may be, in fact, insincere, because they do not follow the scriptures to the letter. The others in the sect have their own personal ways of conducting self- and group-analysis, but suffice it to say that all of these "religious styles" amount to variations on the same ideological theme and, again, they undergo constant changes in a variety of different situations the members find themselves in.

It might be appropriate here to discuss briefly additional features of the ideological system as they are applied to the problem of maintaining implicit faith through an on-going process of criticism and evaluation. When group life is jeapordized, whether by someone's threatening to quit the group, or by some not-so-minor disagreements that may occasionally arise, consensual ideology is brought into the forefront of situational evaluation and definition. People appeal to each other on the grounds of familiarity and in the name of the extended family. Faith in God is thus related to faith in one another; it is a faith that, not unlike religious faith, must be kept implicit. In a sense, challenges to one's faith in God are not as serious as challenges to one's faith in the family qua family, because the former can be easily ignored or corrected, while the latter imply the existence of a real problem that must be dealt with immediately. In other words, faith in God is an entirely subjective thing and is demonstrable in a set number of ways that amount to a virtual routine of rites, prayers, verbal statements, and so on. Faith in the extended family, though, can only be demonstrated in a direct, and personal, way:

XUM

One shows his faith by being faithful, by sticking with the others through thick and thin, by being genuinely concerned for the welfare of others and by carrying one's share of the load. This is a delicate kind of mutuality that can easily be upset. If one's spiritual problems become the subject of group criticism, the person may feel "dumped on," and what follows may involve a complete re-examination of the group's motives for doing what they do. Once Rosemarie had been told by several members that they felt that her child's obnoxious behavior (the latter had hit the other children and didn't want to share toys with them) was due to her (Rosemarie's) lack of (spiritual) progress. Rosemarie, much to everyone's apparent surprise, decided to leave the group because she felt that they had in effect told her that she was a potential threat to everyone's spiritual growth. After much coaxing on the parts of others, and after Rosemarie agreed to try to deal with the child, she decided to remain with the group. The encounter alluded to here, thus, is an example of the social function of the consensual ideology, for the solidarity of the group of original founders was reinforced.

Hippie ideology, I have stated, serves as a means by which members occasionally doff their religious identities. This usually happens when austerities become a nuisance to some members. Once during a day of fasting, several complained that they simply couldn't keep food off their minds. Within a few minutes the definition of the fasting situation was changed to one in which everyone played the role of hippie. Mention was made of how "square" the group was acting and how ridiculous the scene would appear from the hip perspective. Soon, people were laughing, joking, drinking coffee, and eating pastries, while at the same time attempting, _vis à vis_ the hippie ideology, to justify the fact that the attempt at fasting had failed. It was finally decided that no one had been in fact ready to fast on that particular day, that the entire episode was a sort of collective ego-trip, and that it was much more "righteous" to indulge the senses "out front" rather than hide behind a façade of spirituality. That evening, of course, Fred suggested that everyone "meditate on it," so the religious attitude was cultivated once again.

The faith in hipness that was demonstrated in the above instance is, I think, a variation on the "faith-in-God" theme. The members implicitly perceived that fasting was, in this particular instance, in violation of the spontaneity edict which hippie ideology upholds. The fasting had been planned in advance, so the members were not as likely to carry it out. Had it been spontaneously instituted, in other words, it is probable that no one would have voiced any disagreement.

Finally, implicit faith in the cosmic liberty is demonstrated daily by the members of the sect when they carry out their idiosyncratic religious practices. If a person wants to meditate on the beach all afternoon, he may make reference to the fact that he merely intends to do his thing, which is generally affirmed by all others present who, in so affirming, then relate the thing that they are doing. In this manner, the members acknowledge each other's special "spiritual needs," and if any objections are raised, they must be serious indeed. When doing one's thing produces

XUM

problems, it is usually the case that one's (cosmic) thing infringes on someone else's thing, such as on the occasions when women with children must ask others to babysit while the mother occupies herself with other activities. In these instances people try to determine which of the conflicting actions is the more spiritual.

Ideology and Socialization

The preceding discussion suggests, I think, that ideological usages extend into the important area of socialization, by which I mean the process through which one is divested of a secular identity and adopts a new one that befits his new-found (or newly awakened) religious convictions. In the early stages of this research project I learned that the members of the sect were fairly intolerant of those who were ignorant of the practices and beliefs of the group. I was particularly sensitive to this because of my tenuous position in the group and because it seemed to me at the time that what the Cosmic Libertarians termed "ignorance" might just as well be called "innocence." After all, one could not be expected to know the in's and out's of Hinduism, in all of its ritualistic and philosophical details. But in the sect it is striking that one is expected to know everything one needs to know from the very beginning. In fact, it is demanded of the initiate, of the prospective member (new-comers are designated by no particular title), that he pay rigorous attention, that he be at least aware of what others are doing, and that he otherwise open himself to all of the spiritual ramifications of his actions and the actions of those with whom he aspires to become socially involved. In point of fact, the members of the inner circle are less than patient with those who seek to join them, and at times I felt that new-comers were being done a disservice by the sect members who treated them in a belligerent fashion.

There seem to be at least two important reasons why this intolerance manifests itself when others display their "ignorance" of ritual and scripture. In the first place, this reflects the considerable tension that the members of the inner circle are experiencing as they try to maintain an attitude of implicit faith in everything that the sect stands for. When questions are raised (or asked) even in innocence, the internal continuity that is supporting the thing being asked about is momentarily broken. What one is doing when he is before the altar should be self-evident, but to the novice who is as yet uncommitted, or, at worst, merely curious, it may not be. Thus, when questioned as to the nature of an action, the response must necessarily be a difficult one to make. This is because the balance between worship on the one hand and mere religious posturing on the other is precarious indeed. And, what passes as common sense is often quite difficult to articulate. The members of the sect, it might be added, have from time to time discussed with me what they consider to be the principle difficulty with leading their kind of life in America; namely, that the capacity for the kind of implicit faith that the members are trying to maintain is not great, is, in fact, practically nil. Indeed, because of the secularization of society and its institutions--including not incidentally religious ones--during the industrial and post-industrial revolutions, pentecostal faith implies the existence of a "cognitive minority"; that is, a minority that is

XUM

subject to pressure on a social as well as on a cognitive level because of the existential fact of secularization. "Intolerance," though it may seem to be in violation of the hippie idea of complete toleration of others, arises from the fact of the sect's status as a cognitive minority, a fact of which the members are most of the time grimly aware.[24] Their insecurity, if it can be termed that, does not stop, in other words, at the sect's door; rather, it extends into the consciousness of each devotee.

The other main reason why this intolerance of persons who cannot know what is going on and why has to do with the sect's conception of the ego as an external barrier to spiritual liberation. To a great extent the sect members have reified the concept of the ego--so much so, in fact, that they conceive of it as a palpable "thing," a thing that undoubtedly exists, and which can be, if over or misused, a hindrance to the religious life. This conception of the ego in all probability stems from the pan-Hindu and hippie ideologies. In the case of the former, the ego must actually be dispensed with altogether if one is to successfully "merge with the ineffable Brahman." One's ego-self is seen as an attachment, to which one, in his ignorance, clings with great tenacity, "like a miser to his wealth." In terms of the hippie ideology as espoused by the Cosmic Libertarians, the ego is the product of the oppression wrought on the individual by traditional institutions. Hence, the ego is the sum total of all of the impressions society has made upon the Self. The object here, I think, is to become autonomous by living outside society; to rid oneself of "hangups" (ego trips) is to achieve liberation. In other words, the intrusion of outsiders' egos is a reminder of how fragile their non-ego attachments are.

An additional point can be made, perhaps, about the member's use of psychedelic drugs, particularly LSD-25, mescaline, peyote, and psilocybin. According to the members of the sect who have taken these drugs, their effects are, generally speaking, to break down or to dissolve the ego and place the remaining "true Self" in tune with the cosmos. Here is, in other words, another parallel that the members see between drug-induced experiences and Hindu theology.

In any case, the members firmly believe that this thing, the ego, is within everyone, that it prevents one from realizing God (or one's own true nature which is said to be divine), causes arguments, hang-ups, problems, sorrow, and everything else that goes wrong in life. Thus, the reason why one cannot say, "I want to know what is going on," is that, from the point of view of the devotee, the "I" who is asking is not aware of the fact that its "true" (spiritual) identity is obscured by its own "attachment" to the ego-sense. (Thus questioning by outsiders is *itself* evidence of their non-spirituality.)

The members of the sect have a way of stating this which is, I believe, more in line with the traditional Vedantic interpretation of the ego. Brahman, it is said in the *Upanishads*, is the only reality. Brahman is in everything and in nothing. Instead of identifying with Brahman, however, man identifies with the phenomenal (i.e. empirical) world. In a sense, man thus creates this world himself with his perceptions of it. He reifies

XUM

it, and believes that it is something when in fact there is only Brahman. The ego, thus conceived, is not only a part of man's personality, it is his personality, and this personality is the world. When Brahman is realized, the ego falls away, "like the chaff from wheat."

Since the members of the sect hold this view, or a reasonable facsimile thereof, it must indeed appear absurd to them when someone does not know what meditation is, what the offering of flowers means, how one goes about offering incense to the Lord, or why one tries to realize God. An enlightened devotee, or a sincere person who is seeking enlightenment, presumably would know (in his heart?) what the religious life is all about. Only the crass ego with all of its "world-bewitching power" would entertain questions such as these. The true seeker, the right-minded seeker asks instead: "How does one go about realizing God?" Since one must "cry for the Lord like a child for its mother" in order to have the liberating experience, there is no need, the members feel, to waste time and energy on social amenities and on theological explanations. As Peter L. Berger has put it in his book, A Rumor of Angels, "The fundamental religious impulse is not to theorize about transcendence but to worship it."[25] The members of the sect, to be sure, are in the business of transcending "egos," not only their own, but the "egos" of others as well. Thus, manifestations of intolerance of the ignorance (or innocence) of new-comers and outsiders when they occur constitute efforts on the one hand to maintain the cognitive continuity that is a prerequisite of implicit faith, and, on the other hand, to establish a cognitive position for the would-be member's or outsider's ego, a position that is far enough removed from the person that it can then be summarily, if not systematically (through yoga) dealt with. That a person might not go along with such a maneuver seems almost too obvious, yet to the people who have joined the sect this is a problem that is not, it would seem to me, particularly vexing, because all new-comers appear to have had a great deal of practice as young persons in trying on new identities, so one more identity change couldn't hurt.

What I am saying is that the sect is a very precarious structure. The members have paid obsessive attention to every detail in their lives--I have an urge to call this hysterical self-analysis--which might suggest to an outsider that they are being dearly threatened by unseen forces that can presumably annihilate the social system in an instant. They have, in order to stem the efficacy of these forces, created an invidious distinction between themselves and the outside world. I do not mean to imply that the members are clinging to one another in fear, because daily life is indeed mellow if one is inclined toward that sort of thing. It is quiet, peaceful; one has the opportunity to read, meditate, think, or simply to groove to his heart's content, provided that it is done in the name of, if not in the actual striving toward, God-realization. Rather, I am saying simply that this life style is not particularly easy to maintain, so it becomes quite practical to demand of oneself and others implicit faith. At least in this way, one member told me, "the good vibes will last as long as possible"; when the "church" goes, it goes, and no one will have been brought down by having to disbelieve, to lose that crucial implicit faith.

That which poses the greatest threat to implicit faith, then, is nothing more nor less than the internalized "ego," the thing that poses as the "true self" but which is a gross imitation of it. In order to reduce its destructive potentialities it must be externalized; that is, removed from the person and subjected to all manner of assaults. In other words, the ego is destructive in terms of its power to disrupt the subjective cognitive dimensions of faith and to disrupt social relations vis à vis uncontrolled intrusions into sect life by "ignorant" strangers and/or newcomers who have not been sensitized to the special conditions, in particular that of maintaining implicit faith, that prevail in the religious setting.

The exorcism of the non-member's ego is thus the first stage in the socialization process, a stage through which all must pass if they are to become devotees in the sense understood by the members of the inner circle of the sect.

Ideology and Becoming Religions

The ideological framework is, as we have seen fairly fluid, and it has a variety of uses. In a sense it is a closed system that justifies the sect's view of the religious life and of the importance of maintaining distance from strangers. By implication, then, the role that ideology plays in the socialization of new members is a crucial one, for without the perspective that the ideological framework affords, one simply could not be a participant in this religious setting.

The most important feature of the religious person's initial involvement in the sect is his willingness to give up his previous identity and adopt a new one. The members of the sect attempt to bring this about by placing before the new-comer a program of prayer, meditation, austerities, and the study of the scriptures (and the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples). Again, the person is not told what to do in so many words. Rather, he is expected to learn from watching what others do and he creates his own program (with the help of the others). Since the others rarely follow precise routines, this is somewhat problematic for the prospective member, so he must get on with the spiritual business at hand as best he can. Any deviations from the path that the others recognize are pointed out to him, and he is closely watched for his reactions to situations that arise or to experiences that are had.

Usually new-comers will be taken to the Vedanta Society by the members of the inner circle in order for him to be exposed to the group's guru. After this is accomplished and the members are filing out of the temple, each is invited to shake the swami's hand. The members of the inner circle often cluster around the new-comer as he confronts the swami for the first time, and they make it quite clear that they are assessing the individual's response to this holiest of holymen. I recall one prospective member who, immediately after shaking hands with the guru following a Vedanta Society's service, seemed to swoon. Her face flushed with what I mistakenly assumed was embarrassment, but then as her eyes rolled back into her head and she staggered a few steps, I could see that it was something else.

"What is it?" I asked, as only a sociologist could. After blinking a few times and smiling broadly with the red still in her checks, she said, in the poised passion of restraint, "His eyes." The members who were present, of course, took this as a sign of "spiritual readiness"; that is, as a sign of the person's readiness to accept the guru as her teacher and to lead along with the other Cosmic Libertarians the life of the spiritual seeker, the devoted householder. Others who did not respond with exclamations of the "high" that they received from the swami were chided and teased for being "worldly" and "insensitive." Their "egos" were preventing them from experiencing a special kind of "high" that comes from contact with the holy. Incidentally, these persons, some of whom came and went, while others stayed on with the group, were subjected to constant criticism and were exhorted to "give up their egos." Those who were receptive to the swami and who "tripped out," or otherwise expressed profound gratitude for having been introduced to the holy man, seemed to have been accorded high prestige. Their egos, apparently, were not likely to pose much of a threat to the members' faith or to the sect's social life.

New-comers were also initially questioned in social contexts that resemble the encounter groups that are popular in contemporary, middle class society. The member is seated in a rather uncomfortable chair and asked how he "feels" about God, about leading a spiritual life, about the amount of spiritual progress he has already achieved, and about a lot of other subjects that the sect members deem important. I observed that

XUM

one new-comer to the sect was asked to comment on the vibrations that were said to be emanating from a large picture of Ramakrishna that adorns a wall in the "church." When he began to stammer somewhat after running out of words, he was told that had he been aware of what he was doing, he would not have said a word, since a true experiencing of Ramakrishna's charisma was not amenable to linguistic description. Then, the same member was asked how old he was, and when he replied, "Twenty-seven," a member retorted, "That's how old your ego is. Your real nature is ageless." Trick questions asked in these encounters play an important part in socialization, since they set up the prospective member for assaults on his "ego" as well as introducing him to sect ideology. I should state, also, that if a person accuses others of tricking him or of playing games, then the encounter-type therapy is intensified. In the sect the best defense to have is no defense at all.

Another important role that ideology plays in the socialization process is that of conditioning the prospective member to a new set of cognitive assumptions about who he is and what life in the sect is about. I have already discussed this, but I think some additional comments are in order for clarification purposes. The new-comer is given a cursory definition of the cosmic liberty and of the consensuality that binds the original founders together. In fact, it is considered reasonable that he ask about such things, and the answers given him are usually straightforward enough to satisfy his curiosity and give him a sufficient operational definition. But in the area of the sacred, again, no questions are allowed if they do not pertain directly to the issue of "realizing God." One new-comer, for instance, asked how old Ramakrishna was when he died. He was told that he could not believe in God if he thought that Ramakrishna was dead and was instructed to read the Gospel. "Such details are for intellectuals,"Shivadas said, pointing at me, "We don't have time for such things. We are trying to realize God, not write articles." On the other hand, the members are most helpful to those who appear to be "sincerely" trying to learn about Ramakrishna's life and teachings, or about the Vedanta, or about how one goes about getting initiated into bhakti yoga by the guru. And, in large part, discussions relating to these topics occupy a good deal of the initiate's first few weeks (and in some cases months) with the group.

As time passes, the initiate is given the opportunity in the talking of God rituals to express some of his new-found religious convictions. The members pay close attention to his use of pronouns, particularly "I," "me," "mine," and "your," these words being triggers which can unleash collective assaults upon his offending ego. And, the initiate is encouraged to examine his own ego aloud with others in attendance. Usually this is a daily occurrance, since new-comers are told that if they want to be "full-fledged members" (membership has never been, to my satisfaction, at least, defined by the group) then they must make daily visits to the "church." Thus, most people who are interested in "joining" are also faced with the problem of finding suitable housing in the immediate vicinity of the group at the same time that they are being divested of

XUM

their former identities and are acquiring new ones.

The very words that each member uses to describe events, situations, and things are said to reflect the state of one's inner-most Self. In the sect there are acceptable and unacceptable ways of describing things, and the initiate learns quickly that he must be extremely careful about his use of language. God, for instance, is consistently referred to as a familiar entity. Abstract references to a benign, supra-mundane reality constitute a special kind of heresy. And, everything belongs to God; nothing is his or hers, mine or theirs. So, too, are mystical experiences, subjective states of mind, notions of the good, the beautiful, and the like spoken of in concrete terms. Pictures of dreams or religious visions painted by the words of members take on the substance of tangible, objective reality. Mind-stuff, ideas, theology, and the concepts which are used to describe these things are understood to be the real core of reality. In terms of the sect's ideology, then, language is seen as a powerful tool which helps to defend against the inevitable intrusion of the world of objects, of the body, of the senses. I think that it can be stated that when one learns the religious vocabulary, when its use is appropriate, and what inflections go with it then one has become a member. In other words, the use of this language, I think, requires that certain criteria be demonstrably met, criteria that relate to the new member's adoption of the sect's ideological stance and his showing others the extent of his religious commitment. The idea of the ego as a barrier to liberation, for instance, must be firmly implanted in the consciousness

XUM

of the individual, and he must demonstrate that he is indeed detached from his ego. There are numerous ways in which this is determined by the veteran religionists in the sect. In addition, the new member must exhibit linguistic facility in areas in which he has not necessarily gained much familiarity. This is particularly so in the realm of purely mystical phenomena. One cannot simply say, for instance, "Ramakrishna said such and such to me," because the other members "know" that he did not. On the other hand, however, one can say, as one novice did, and as many veterans often do say, "Ramakrishna's love is so overwhelming; I can feel it everywhere," and not be accused of heresy. Finally, one must learn how to describe ordinary (i.e. empirical) phenomena in the language of the scriptures; that is, not only must he be able to see parallels or epiphanies in his daily life that are alluded to in the Hindu texts, but he must also express them in the poetic language in which those texts are written. One initiate told me about a bird that she had seen. (It was an important event, I suppose, because there doesn't seem to be an overabundance of birds in the urban area of Los Angeles where the sect is located.)

> My eyes attached themselves on the dove, and my mind thought, 'Here is the self-same creature that flies within my heart, partaking of the fruit of my life, and all the while looking on in silence.' The bird was me, and I was he, and we were both of Brahman. Isn't it wonderful?[26]

This is not to imply that all of the members fancy themselves poets, but simply to stress the importance of the role that language plays in socialization. In fact, it is probably the case that the more "poetic"

XUM

one is, and the more ideologically "complete," the newer one is to the group. This is so because the full-time members are engaged in "doing their own thing" and do not spend much time rattling their ideological swords. When they do so, they are usually involved with new-comers, who, by way of contrast, may be devoting much of their time to the actual learning of what constitutes the proper use of ideology. Moreover, fully socialized members believe that "the teacher who deals too much in words, and allows the mind to be carried away by the force of words loses the spirit."[27] This is because the scriptures are merely the "bare bones of religion," whereas "bhakti is the intense love of God . . . bhakti is its own fruition, its own means and its own end." This is an important distinction for the new-comer to the sect to make: One must learn the language without relying on it overmuch, since "the one great advantage of bhakti is that it is the easiest and the most natural way to reach the great divine end in view . . . ."[28] On the other hand, however, Vivekananda cautions, this love is sometimes misdirected and the devotee stands to become fanatical, since all things come from Brahman; even the cravings of the "lower nature" are, again, misdirected love. "Bhakti has to float on smoothly with the current of our nature," Vivekananda says, or else it degenerates into forms of behavior that negate the "true religious spirit."[29]

The Self-Regulating Character of Piety

Loving God, I have said, means that one has implicit faith, and this

XUM

faith, according to the veteran religionists in the sect, need be expressed only when circumstances warrant it. The novice must learn what these circumstances are. By paying close attention to how others go about the business of exclaiming the virtues of the divine and how they testify to their unswerving movement in the direction of God-realization, the novice comes to realize that he cannot invoke the spirit whenever he desires to do so. He can do his own spiritual thing, in other words, but not if it breaks the continuity of someone else's fragile Hindu consciousness. Hippie ideology, I think, plays an important role here. It is consistently used whenever it is felt that a devotee or a group of devotees are "being silly" about their religious fervor. Hippie ideology is a safety valve, in other words, a release from the power of bhakti, which prevents worship from becoming "fanatical."

One new-comer, who was trying very hard to be accepted, one day mentioned that he intended to fast until he had a vision of Ramakrishna. He was being, I think, very serious about this, but the members who heard this remark began to laugh and told him that he must be "crazy." "After all," one member said to the novice, "Fasting will only remind you that you haven't eaten anything in a long time." The novice seemed somewhat confused by this, but he agreed to give up the plan after it was explained to him that even though his love for God was very intense, it wasn't very "cool" to force things. "Besides, God might just let you starve to death, and then you'd just have to start all over again in another life." I think that what the members were saying to the new-comer was that he was taking himself and his religious quest too seriously, that he was not being "natural." The best way to realize God, the members say, is simply to let it happen, to "let the heart take its natural course." Hippie ideology, then, must also be learned by the new-comers if they are not already aware of it, since this ideology, in the words of Fred, "keeps the lid on the kettle"; that is, it prevents the God-realization game from getting out of hand.

All the while that the initiate is learning to love Ramakrishna, the guru, and the whole notion of the divine in general, and is learning to express this in a variety of appropriate ways _vis à vis_ the sect's ideological framework, his very demeanor is being transformed. He must learn how to present his new religious self to the others in the group. Behavior that he may have taken utterly for granted before he came into contact with the sect, such as the crossing of his legs, certain types of body and facial gestures, getting a drink when he is thirsty, and a wide range of natural movements that he once considered to be normal, gradually come under his own and the group's scrutiny. He must cultivate within (or rather, without) himself an "aura" which befits the identity of the devotee. This aura, is intimately related to his ability to project the image of someone who is spiritual-minded, eager for God-realization, and receptive to a divine dispensation. This image, as it is projected by others, is one of an intensely aware individual, whose eyes are never vacant, whose eyes never wander, whose brow reflects deep and sober thought, whose lips seldom, if ever, blather, never smile, never frown, whose

XUM

limbs are always poised, whose voice is never too loud, whose words are simple, but expressive, and who is, above all, honest, tolerant, and always on the verge of spontaneous action. Any wanton tapping of the feet, drumming of the fingers, sighing or heaving of the chest, or any other sign of worldly distraction, loss of cosmic control, or just plain bad vibes, brings censure. But, again, none of this can be taken too seriously, because it would not be hip.

If (as occasionally happens) a prospective member wonders aloud if there is any justice in a situation that requires him to do what others say but not what they are likely to do, then he is sternly reminded that everyone helps each other to do the right thing, and, when the new member is elevated to the status of the rest of the members of the group, then he will be listened to. In this way (of closely monitoring every aspect of personal behavior and mannerism) a kind of self-control is instituted. The individual learns to see himself in a new light; that is, he learns to see himself as others in the group see him. Eventually his old self disappears, or at least fades into the background, and the new self, the religious (and the hip) self, emerges.

All of this can be subsumed under the rubric of "keeping the company of the holy." Under normal circumstances in the sect, even though the members do not live under the same roof, everyone is very much a part of everyone else's life space. For the novice, there are few "backstage areas" where he can find relief. The territories of the initiate's self, are consistently violated by the members of the inner circle. Nothing is allowed to remain hidden, and nothing can be kept from others. The inner circle demands complete honesty and openness. When one expresses fear of being threatened in such a manner, he is castigated and told to "shape up," because what is happening will be good for him in the end. Sometimes ordinary situations become intense encounters with the initiate's personal biography being subjected to the criticisms of the group. In these encounters, the prospective member usually learns that while others have areas of their own lives that are private and therefore outside the legitimate reach of fellow members, he can lay claim to no such "territory of self." If he hesitates, moreover, to recognize what others see in him, or otherwise erects barriers of defense, he is chastized all the more. And, if he attempts to counter the blows levied against his utterly reprehensible former self by turning the tables and attacking a few egos of his own, he is apt to discover that he is tilting at windmills, because what is visible to him may not be visible to the group, what is legitimate to him is not worthy, from the group's perspective, of the slightest consideration, and what appears reasonable to him is, to others, the epitome of the absurd. (An example of this occurs in the aforementioned account of the encounter between Fred and the outsider who was told, "Say, 'God'.")

When the members of the inner circle feel that an initiate's defenses have been effectively breached, then they begin to introduce him to some of the things that they believe constitute the rewarding aspects of the religious life. He is allowed, for instance, to give his opinion on sect affairs (such as whether or not to accept a donation from an outer circle member), and is invited to join in the talking of God ritual. Also, he is given encouragement regarding meditation and is complimented on his "rapid spiritual progress." His new identity is given a great deal of reinforcement by the members' making reference to this or that deity or mythological figure whom the new devotee presumably resembles. Some times this actually culminates in an initiate's being given a Sanskrit name, but usually names are bestowed upon one by the guru.

Formal initiation by the guru into bhakti yoga marks an important stage in the new member's socialization. Because the guru is quite old and in failing health, and because of his wide reputation, the "waiting list" for prospective initiates is quite long. New-comers to the Cosmic Liberty church sometimes manage to be placed near the top of the "list," which is taken as a sign of a person's latent spiritual potentialities. Members who have to wait a long time (there are stories about people who have waited years, and even "lifetimes" for initiation) must content themselves with a kind of improvisational yoga; that is, they glean from the literature a few simple yogic techniques which they then employ, or else they ask others in the group to show them how to meditate. In this way, as in the other ways described in the previous discussion of social roles and contexts, the members of the inner circle come to play the role of "guru." This personal involvement with the new-comers spiritual life is justified, again, on the grounds that the scriptures are just so many words, and that, "The soul can only receive impulses from another soul, and from nothing else."[30] While the ideal "soul" is that of the

Vedantic swami, the members of the inner circle feel that it is appropriate that they teach new-comers a little about meditation and yoga in general.

The socialization of new members, thus, involves a process of actively giving up or "purging" an old identity and the self-conscious construction of a new one. This takes place along the lines dictated by the ideological framework. Primarily, the socialization process motivates the novice to develop implicit faith in God and faith in the aims of the sect. This is accomplished by a series of actions which define the ego of the initiate as an external barrier to liberation. In time, the new member (and I have observed the socialization of six new members) takes his place alongside the others in their pursuit of God-realization, and he learns how to regulate his developing religious zeal by the proper use of the hippie ideology.

Finally, ideology plays an important role in the definition of a wide variety of situations. Depending on which ideological component is being employed, situations take on different meanings for the actors involved in them. For example, the pan-Hindu ideology defines religious situations, such as talking of God, meditating, praying, worshipping, fasting, and so on. Hippie ideology defines the social contexts of rapping and hustling. When members begin to relate to one another on the basis of the hippie ideas discussed in the first part of this chapter, then the situation invariably reverts to that non-religious sphere of sect life. Consensual ideology as I have said is appealed to when the situation is defined as problematic; that is, when there is discord among the members that cannot be resolved by reference to pan-Hinduism or to the hippie ethic.

Lastly, the ideology of the cosmic liberty defines a private sphere of life that members occasionally enter in order to attain a modicum of distance from the group while at the same time remaining part of it. In other words, the ideology of the cosmic liberty enables people to be in but not of the religious situation. The "disinterested Hindu" can legitimately effect a specialized non-involvement, especially when their is dischord among sect members.

Finally, in order for new-comers to participate in group life they must have at their disposal the means for defining situations in the appropriate manner. These means are the ideologies themselves, and their use is taught to them by the other members who demonstrate the ways in which situations change on an ideological basis. To effectively teach a new-comer the behaviors and attitudes that are deemed appropriate to life in the religious milieu, friendships are developed. Each person is made to feel that others have his best interests at heart when socialization is taking place. Supportive actions taken by the veteran members, of course, are designed to help the new-comer define himself in a new way. Finally, the new member gradually comes to see himself as a devotee who is receptive to divine influence and who is, therefore, a candidate for God-realization (i.e. salvation), not to mention full membership, with all of the honors and privileges pertaining thereto.

The ideological framework of the sect constitutes a kind of cultural super-structure which reinforces the patterns of social life that the members have improvised. Because this framework is broad in scope, it has applicability in a wide variety of situations that arise both within and without the confines of the sect. It furthermore reinforces a particular cognitive structure that the members attempt to maintain even in the course of interacting with outsiders. And, finally, ideology provides the basis for the religious experience, and when the religious experience occurs, as it frequently does in the form of the rise of a special mentality or group feeling, the ideological framework is itself reinforced.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. Jerry Simmons and Barry Winograd, It's Happening, pp. 15-16.

2. Bennett M. Berger, Looking for America, pp. 118-135.

3. Bennett M. Berger, Looking for America, p. 122.

4. Bennett M. Berger, Looking for America, p. 122.

5. Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's (New York: Viking Press, 1934).

6. Bennett M. Berger, Looking for America, p. 122.

7. Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counterculture, p. 135.

8. W.Y. Evens-Wentz, Tibetan Book of the Dead (London: Oxford University Press, 1936); Swami Prabhayananda and Frederick Manchester (trans.), The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1968); Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Barnes (trans.) The I Ching or Book of Changes (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966); and, Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (trans.), The Song of God: Bhagavad Gita (New York: New American Library, Signet Books, 1951).

9. For a discussion of Vivekananda's reception in America see Richard Mathison, Faiths, Cults, and Sects of America (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1960).

10. Rather, the process which led the group to Hinduism was that of "drift." For a discussion of how young persons, through "uninformed actions" rather than through "rational choices," drift into deviant subcultures see, David Matza, Delinquency and Drift (New York: Wiley, 1964.)

11. Heinrich Zimmer, Philosophies of India, pp. 560-602.

12. Paramahamsa Yogananda, Autobiography of a Yogi (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1969); see also his, Whispers From Eternity (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1959).

13. Eliot Deutsch, Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1969).

14. See, for instance, F. Max Muller, Ramakrishna: His Life and Teachings

XUM

(London: Longmans, Green, 1898); and, Romain Rolland (trans. by E.F. Malcolm-Smith), Prophets of the New India (New York: A and C Boni, 1930), in addition to Swami Saradananda, Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master, and, Christopher Isherwood, Ramakrishna and His Disciples.

15. See Swami Gambhirananda, History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957).

16. Swami Prabhavananda's works include, Shankara's Crest Jewel of Discrimination; The Song of God: Bhagavad Gita; How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali; The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal; and, The Sermon on the Mount According to the Vedanta (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1968), among other articles and lectures too numerous to mention here.

17. Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counterculture, p. 135.

18. Max Weber (trans. and ed. by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale), The Religion of India (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958), pp. 3-54.

19. See Swami Vivekananda, Bhakti Yoga (Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas: Published by Swami Chidatmanananda, President, Advaita Ashrama, 1964); and Swami Vivekananda, Jnana-Yoga (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1955). These two works discuss the various types of yoga.

20. Swami Suddhasatwananda (compiler), Thus Spake Sri Ramakrishna (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1963), pp. 32-33.

21. Mahendrananth Gupta, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna; Swami Saradananda, Sri RamaKrishna: The Great Master.

22. Mahatma Gandhi, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi [35 Volumes] (Delhi: Navajivan Press, 1967), No. 25.

23. One example of a self-protective game that members indulge in is what they call "hook," a version of which was played by Shivadas on the customs agent. Hooking someone with a statement that is apt to be taken as "moral," "character-implicating," or otherwise important is a great source of entertainment and prestige. To be "hooked" means that one has fallen for a non-serious statement by treating it as a serious one. Thus, one proves himself to be, in the case

of the religious context, "attached to his ego," or, in a secular context (as in the above case), "square."

24. For a discussion of the concept "cognitive minority," see Peter L. Berger, A Rumor of Angels (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., Anchor Books, 1970) pp. 5-7, 17.

25. Peter L. Berger, A Rumor of Angels, p. 86.

26. The above is an improvised version of a verse in the Svetasvatara Upanishad. Juan Mascaro (trans.), The Upanishads (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1969), p. 91, renders the verse in the following manner: "There are two birds, two sweet friends, who dwell on the self-same tree. The one eats the fruits thereof, and the other looks on in silence. The first is the human soul who, resting on that tree, though active, feels sad in his unwisdom. But on beholding the power and the glory of the higher Spirit, he becomes free from sorrow."

27. Swami Vivekananda, Bhakti-Yoga, p. 33.

28. Swami Vivekananda, Bhakti-Yoga, p. 4.

29. Swami Vivekananda, Bhakti-Yoga, p. 20.

30. Swami Vivekananda, Bhakti-Yoga, p. 26.

XUM

CHAPTER V

The Sect and the Youth Culture

A Question of Sincerity

The Church of the Cosmic Liberty is not as enigmatic a phenomenon as it might appear to be. That the members succeeded in the adoption of a predominantly pietistic and world-rejecting world view, that they have abandoned "Western precepts" in order to follow their own stylized version of Hinduism, that they have created a life style that intentionally makes their Hinduism and their piety possible is in itself a culturally resonant curiosity, even though similar departures from the religious and social norms of society are not altogether uncommon. (America has had a long history of nominally deviant religious sub-groups that created life-styles anti-thetical to the dominant cultural and social traits of most citizens, e.g. the Seventh Day Adventists, the Amish, the 19th Century communards, and so on.)[1] Still, it is appropriate that the meaning of the sect as a sociological phenomenon be discussed at this point. Thus far I have treated and portrayed the sect as a more or less isolated entity--as a kind of nether-world existing in the midst of a contemporary, urban American environment. From the previous discussion the members may appear to be nearly oblivious to what most of us would piously, if not precisely, term "the real world." Even if the Church of the Cosmic Liberty is a bit lacking in the religious vision department (no member claims to have had special word from on high that is worth repeating, at any rate), in terms of ideology alone, each member has more than enough to think about, more than enough with which to occupy him or herself for some time to come. But this has an unreal character to it because such mind-games are rather one-dimensional and decidedly vulnerable to the rise of ennui and to the sense that involvement in such activities is somewhat ironic; For as "hip," "together," "happening," "active," "laid back," and "moving" as they claim to be, the Cosmic Libertarians are, much of the time, a sober, passive and helpless lot.

This paradox of social existence in the sect is constantly lurking beneath every witty pronouncement, every deftdeployment of the word-magic weaponry, every ritual--spontaneous or otherwise--every new sojourn into the realm of the elusive identity. If it does not remain submerged, hidden from the members' view, then it is, at any rate, capable of being ignored. And, for the time being, all is well.

All of this points to the precariousness of social life in the Church of the Cosmic Liberty, and, in addition, it reveals a hidden meaning in the ritual involvements, ideological pronouncements, and subjective, ecstatic heightenings of mood which may not be immediately apparent. The fact that the members of the sect occasionally dispense with their religiosity and revert to the hippie role-playing and identity nurturing that takes them outside the sect's sovereignty invites the following questions. How sincere are people who profess to be totally immersed in the pursuit of other-worldly religious goals, but who feel that they can at any time revert to the playing of secular roles? If this role-changing is simply a matter of convenience, then it might mean that the members are merely pretending to be religious, that their involvement with their guru and the whole Hindu system is a kind of game, and that their scene, which has been self-consciously created to deal with a wide range of contingencies, must serve some other (possibly devious) purpose. Not that the swami himself does not have to don a secular hat now and then in order to carry out, say, the business of book-publishing; but, for the Cosmic Libertarians, whose religiosity, unlike that of the swami, is far from institutionalized, secular intrusions into their sacred domain allow the paradox of social existence to rear its ugly head. How is it that someone can claim to have voluntarily created a life style that promises its practitioners spiritual liberation, while at the same time claiming that all of one's actions are under the mediating influence of the divine and are, therefore, involuntary? Although the Cosmic Libertarians might answer that they voluntarily submitted themselves to spiritual forces and do not resist being guided by them, such an answer is not apt to satisfy the skeptic. Nor should it. Rational analysis is not their thing. The Cosmic Libertarians remain true to their belief in the absolute irreconcilability of the mystical and empirical realms. Should they find themselves in doubt because the ironies that their style of life tends to generate have eluded even their specialized blinders, they can always do japa until the mind is concerned only with Sri Ramakrishna or Swami or Brahman or the Eternal Self; or better yet, they can ignorethe questions and the

XUM

problems by paying attention to ritual details, which are (in line with the goals of yoga) intentionally fulfilling and meaningful in and of themselves, and this is the stuff that makes the search for identity so intriguing.

The capacity to render inconsequential the paradox of their social existence is, I think, the basis for the members' attempting to maintain an implicit, proverbial faith in the guru, the sect, in the various forms of god, in the youth culture, and in themselves. A concerted effort is made by all members alike to attain a non-reflective self-awareness of each person's involvement, piety, and hipness as an essentially valuable and authentic thing. But even, or perhaps especially, these noble attempts to be heroic without beclouding the heroic mentality with thoughts of heroism are, in terms of their ironic potentialities, somewhat hazardous. But, again, yoga will at least beg the question, if it does arise at all, which is not likely since the insulation against irony is durable, time-tested. But this still does not explain how or why the members are prone to simply shed their mantle of religiosity in favor of a secular mode of being or interaction. Does this practice mean that the members are phoney, insincere?

The World of the Young

This question can only be answered by reference to the members' world-taken-for-granted. The world that is tangent to the members' "extended family" is characterized by fleeting relationships, by a certain amount of role discrepancy, status anxiety, and by the mental and geographic mobility of most of the inhabitants. Apart from the adults who are members of the outer circle (including those who are encountered at the Vedanta Society) and who present a picture of complete normalcy (apart from their taste for exotic religion, perhaps), most of the people who come into contact with the devotees are members of various milieux that have their roots in California's youth culture. Folk and rock musicians, communards, dealers of psychedelic drugs, followers of this or that guru or esoteric philosophy, full-time hitchhikers, and drop-outs of one type or another playing a wide range of social roles maintain persistent, although irregular, contact with the Church of the Cosmic Liberty. For the devotees, these outsiders bring news of diverse happenings in the youth culture, and the encounters between individuals and groups with varying interests and inclinations help to cement the bond between the youthful "underground" and the sect. Again, the relationships and ties among these people are at best tenuous, although they may be intense and deeply felt. People are judged on the basis of the extent to which they appear to be engaged in actions that are existentially authentic and status (character) implicating, and interaction between participants is characterized by the generation of considerable emotion and intimacy. People, however, are allowed, even expected, to come and go as they please, and if the roles they play don't suit them, then the roles are changed or abandoned altogether. On the other hand, though, most of the young people are marginally situated *vis à vis* the larger society. Their

XUM

education levels are fairly high, but their incomes are low. They appear to be involved in a daily struggle for survival, but they reject the traditional means by which this struggle is carried out by most members of society. (Stated another way, their voluntary poverty often appears to be a consequence of their inability to find a job rather than their dislike of work. Thus, their anti-materialist sentiments appear to be functional.)

The adults who inhabit this world-taken-for-granted are, in contrast to the young, seen as the epitome of materialistic greed, unjust authority, and arbitrariness. And, their institutions seem absurd not only because they are a threat to the individual's autonomy, but because they contain the obvious contradictions that young people find particularly noxious. The Cosmic Libertarians, moreover, do not seem to be tolerant of the fact that all social institutions are in the shadow of duplicity by virtue of the fact that they "create" their members even as they are "created by them"; that is, institutions harbor the tenuous conflict between willing and unwilling participation in social life. Whether this is their actual experience, or merely their expectation does not really matter to the Cosmic Libertarians who are, in either case, prone to describe the outside world as a threatening power that stands to intervene to prevent the individual from achieving his goal of self-discovery, spiritual realization, and cosmic perfection. Of course, the political, financial, educational, and family institutions are cited as the most offensive sources of the members' discontent, but it is the threateningly omniscient "presence" of "society" which thwarts goals, hangs one up, and destroys innocence, truth, beauty and all the rest that is there for the creation of the good life. This is utterly bedeviling to them, and it spurs its youthful antagonists on to new heights, or depths, of existentially authentic denials of its implicit legitimacy.

Thus, the sect sees itself united with the denizens of the youth culture in a common struggle against an enemy that is, by virtue of its psychological as well as its social manifestations, uncommonly powerful and perhaps even bound to win. Sects, rock bands, communes, families, dealing tribes, free stores, and so on are seen by the Cosmic Libertarians to be the barriers that must stem the tide of the encroaching dominant order. When the barriers break down, as they are often wont to do, the members retreat in order to build new ones.

The life style created by the members of the sect, it is true, has in common with the life styles created by a number of other young persons a social process which enables individuals to become detached from the roles that they play, whether these roles be secular, straight, hip, deviant, religious, and so on. Considered in this light, the sect can be understood as a socio-cultural arrangement which allows its members to play the roles of devotee, guru, disciple, leader, follower, hippie, hustler, and so on, which are, again, roles which require only a modicum of inner-identification, however character-implicating they may seem. The question of whether or not the members of the sect are sincere is not completely beside the point, but it is nearly so because of the fact

XUM

that they have been "taken in" by their religious as well as by their secular acts. Being "taken in" is a process which permits of simultaneous voluntary and involuntary action because on-going involvements in daily life prevent one from making the continual distinctions necessary to separate them. Hence, by behaving in a religious manner, one becomes religious. (What was begun as a trip may end as a journey.) But it must be remembered that I am discussing overt behaviors and not inner-identifications. Religion in the sect is simply another form of sociability which renders the whole issue with which religion normally deals (i.e. the question, "Why must man suffer?") less serious than it might be by placing the spiritual quest (including the so-called "austerities") in the realm of fun, leisure and amusement. It is the sense of autonomy, of authenticity alone that is a legitimate means by which the religious (and the hip, for that matter) can be transcended. The transcendent principle, of course, is the efficacy of improvisation, that built-in spontaneity by which means each person can effect the ideally authentic signification of his own, unique being-in-the-world. Each person can, in other words, spontaneously be who he wants to be, and who he is will not prevent him from being someone else if he suddenly (or gradually) tires of his present identity.

The type of social learning that takes place in various youthful milieux (the type found in the Church of the Cosmic Liberty being an example par excellence) is not merely a function of the prolongation of adolescence and its accompanying psycho-social role moratorium. Rather, the learned capacity for identity-changing implies the existence of a generic social process. This, in turn, suggests that an important change in the fabric of the social order is taking place. The socialization of the young is an important feature of all social systems, and when something goes awry in a system, socialization can be affected. In contemporary America there is an unprecedented disruption of this process. While young people are ostensibly learning adult roles during their adolescent period, they are being simultaneously "juvenilized."[2] The resulting dilemma for many young people is manifested in their search for meaning; that is, in their search for Identity or Self.

But, ironically, it is not the Identity or Self in which the young or their adult antagonists find meaning. Through a process of institutionalization of the means by which the search is carried out, the search for meaning itself is made meaningful. Hence, there is a double dilemma for the young, for, on the one hand, the period of adolescence is intended to be a time for the learning of adult responsibilities, for acquiring the requisite skills with which one can then play adult roles; yet, on the other hand, because of the needs of the adult order, this period of adolescence is lengthened and young people are required to spend time "trying on different roles," cultivating their interests, and otherwise having fun in the process of which the social category of "youthfulness" is conferred upon them and it is expected that they will "act young." This self-fulfilling prophecy itself, though highly ambiguous to young and old alike, has considerable meaning. Cultural expectations and moral

XUM

imperatives are attached to it and young people feel that somehow their youthfulness itself should have some kind of intrinsic value. While they are engaged in youthful frivolity, or in the testing of their characters, or in the pursuit of "naturally" idealistic goals, they are simultaneously supposed to avoid ascribing profound significance to whatever they happen to be doing, to not "lose" themselves while in the process of "finding" themselves, and to otherwise avoid imbuing their being-in-the-world, such as it may be, with unbounded importance. But, what often happens is that this search nevertheless becomes meaningful in its own right.

Because the prolongation of adolescence is a fairly recent phenomenon, there is no network of readily available means by which meanings can be found in actions, feelings, and ideas that range from the significant to the trivial, so the young must improvise these meanings as best they can from the available socio-cultural, psychological and historical materials at hand. Improvisation itself thus becomes quite meaningful in the absence of institutionalized criteria which would otherwise be utilized to make sense out of existence and render young persons autonomous, authentic and complete. That many young people carry on their search for the meaningfulness of Identity and Meaning-seeking in the absence of adult approval (and adult supervision as well) is suggested by the apparent deviant character of improvisational youth groups, of which, again, the Church of the Cosmic Liberty is a particularly well-organized and viable example.

XUM

Other Improvisational Youth Groups

The "Church" is not the only example. There are other kinds of improvisational youth groups which facilitate their members' acquisition of the skills, identities and ideologies that allow them to remain in the youth culture beyond the expected age of their adult socialization. These groups flourish partly because they help reduce the ambiguity inherent in adolescence (and, of course, in post-adolescence) by providing young people: First, with the means to act out unconventional roles, engage in activities and acquire experiences that are charged with a special set of "meanings" from which can be derived a relevant and coherent sense of who one is; and, second, with a kind of psychic or mental mobility and sense of inner-detachment that, when coupled with the appropriate structural supports and the impetus to improvise, will afford the member of a given group a measure of protection both from the encroaching, paradoxical mass society and from his own advancing years.

The traditional view of a youth group is that of an impermanent, adult-sponsored organization in which a person's participation is geared toward his learning to function as a bonafide member of the adult social world.[3] However, the importance of the idea of improvisational youth groups (which the Church of the Cosmic Liberty and the groups described below are intended to illustrate) rests on the assertion that their members improvise social technologies which enable them to prolong even further their adolescence, and, as is the case of many of today's youth, learn how to "permanently" remain in the youth culture. This is not to say that improvisational youth groups are permanent. Indeed, they are intentionally impermanent, since their dissolution often appears to follow the successful socialization of a mobile mentality in the members. That is, when improvisational youth groups succeed in providing their members with the ability to detach themselves from all roles and identities--that is to say, from the major portion of them, since most still call themselves men, women, brother, sister, human being, and so on--then the groups tend to break up. What is permanent about these settings is the members' orientation to them. When one "experimental community," "extended family," or "scene" breaks up, many of the members are eager to find another. Such was the case with the Cosmic Libertarians, all of whom had had previous experiences with youth groups similar to the ones described below.*

Hippie Drug Dealers

The data that I collected in 1967 and 1968 in three metropolitan areas of California are necessarily sparse, due to the relative inaccessibility of subjects, but some brief discussion of hippie drug dealers should lend support to my assertions concerning the importance of improvisation and the social and psychic mobility that it facilitates. In speaking of marijuana dealing, I am concerned not so much with its deviant character, but rather with the manner in which it is viewed by those concerned. Fifteen dealers whom I interviewed fancied themselves "bohemians," "hippies," or simply "dealers" rather than criminals, and, not unlike the dealing group that formed the Cosmic Liberty Church, defined their respective, immediate milieux as a kind of "family" or "tribe," and dealing as "authentic action."

---

*Again, see the biographies offered in Appendix I.

Life in the dealing groups, especially in those groups that develop anti-narcotic (anti-heroin, etc.) and pro-psychedelic (marijuana, hashish, LSD, etc.) ideologies, is characterized by a high degree of social solidarity and a sense of group purpose. In general it can be stated that hippie drug dealers are important sources of the ritual communalism that is a fundamental feature of nearly every socio-cultural arrangement (youth group) in the whole youth or, if you prefer, counter-culture. Because the dealing of drugs is illegal and the group is continually threatened (or potentially so) by legal authorities, solidarity rituals are extremely important in social life. And, although the extent of individual involvement varies considerably from group to group, a great deal of similarity between becoming a hippie drug dealer and becoming a hippie Hindu can be shown, especially insofar as the idea of maintaining implicit faith in the "trip" is concerned. The dealers whom I observed in their natural settings all seemed to be on-goingly involved in actions that would implant in themselves the idea that dealing was foremost among possible authentic actions in an otherwise absurd world, and that, of course, one could develop proverbial, implicit awareness of this fact and it was morally good to do so.

The dealers I studied see themselves as pillars of the hippie community who are supplying the substance that has a great deal to do with making of the young people's world views, if not their worlds, what they are.

Sociologically, the dealing scenes are egalitarian "collectives," with everyone sharing money, clothes, automobiles, and, of course, sex and dope. The one rule that is "religiously" followed is that of "doing one's own thing." That is, anyone can do whatever he wants so long as it does not interfere with what someone else is doing. This seems to work well enough, but none of the groups manages to stay together for longer than a year without a major change in personnel. Also, the groups are highly mobile, both vertically and horizontally. The more drugs they deal, the higher is their status (in the eyes of themselves and their many customers). And, the more popular they become in their respective milieux, the more likely it is that they will come to the attention of the local, state, or federal narcotics squads. Thus, they become geographically mobile in order to elude the authorities.

It is interesting to note, too, that the hippie ideology is very much in tact in these dealing scenes, and that in order for one to be a "member" one must give everyday reality a hip interpretation. Socialization into the scenes requires the learning of a variety of verbal and non-verbal skills which pertain not only to drug dealing but to the establishing of interpersonal relationships that are apt to be temporary but nevertheless emotionally intense. And, since dealing is frought with dangers due to the vigilance of the police (or to the dealers' imaginations) character assessment is an important component of nearly every social context.

Since dealing is seen as authentic action, the roles played by dealers are what can be termed "essential." That is, the roles define both who and what people are. One can be a "dealer" per se, (a person who sells marijuana and other psychedelic drugs), a middleman (someone who arranges deals between two or more parties), a smuggler (someone who brings drugs into the area from a foreign country or who arranges the same), and so on. However, as in the case of Church of the Cosmic Liberty, the dealing scenes appear to promote the development of personal detachment from the roles being played. This not only facilitates the making of acquaintances with a variety of people, but it also provides dealers with an "out" which is sometimes necessary if they are to avoid arrest. In other words, dealers cultivate styles that allow them to give up dealing or to portray themselves to others as people who are not necessarily defined by what they do, since such definitions no matter how broadly conceived they are tend to threaten autonomy. Again, a practical application of this "mental mobility" is that it would allow a serious and committed dealer to simply quit dealing when he finds he is under surveilance. And, since he must function in a milieu which may or may not bestow high status upon him, he must be able to switch identities on cue. Although psychedelic drugs are almost universally acclaimed by the hippies and other denizens of the youth- or counter-culture, dealers are often criticized for profit-taking, for selling impure or low-quality drugs, and for bringing non-dealers to the attention of the police and other moral entrepreneurs. Still, dealing is nevertheless regarded as a legitimate means by which a "brother" or "sister" can refrain from having to support himself in a

XUM

conventional way.

When dealing becomes institutionalized, it often happens that the carrying out of successful deals for varying amounts of drugs merely enhances the possibility of attaining other goals which may be associated more with other aspects of rebellion than with drug dealing as such. Most of the dealers in my sample of fifteen people argued that it is more genuine or authentic a practice to give away drugs than to sell them, although most reluctantly stated that "a person's got to make some bread in order to live." In spite of the contradiction in this stance, dealers are more or less condoned, and the fact of the matter is that they are protected by the hippie communities in which they operate. The most admired dealer, however, is the one who meets certain idealistic criteria, but because of the highly egalitarian notions held by the dealers themselves, the de-emphasizing of the economic rewards of dealing is apparent by the subtle, ritual manner in which wealth is treated. For instance, among the dealers I studied it is considered proper to praise the material well-being of others, but a successful dealer cannot rightfully show any overt pride in his own accomplishments or possessions. Note the similarity between this notion of "humility" and that held by the Cosmic Libertarians who, while believing that they have made great spiritual advances as a result of all of their programs of austerity, cannot claim to have done so. In other words, the singing of praises is left to others in the milieu, and this becomes another source of the heightened group feelings that define a significant aspect of social life in the

XUM

entire youth culture.

Once again I am addressing myself to the issue of the discovery of meaning in action. For dealers, dealing harbors this authentic potentiality, but most dealers clearly recognize that it is the process of becoming a dealer rather than being a dealer that is the functional equivalent of finding oneself. That is, dealing is a search of identity, and since one can become a dealer fairly easily by having a supply of the commodity to be dealt and a few customers who will buy it, it would appear that one could, in short order, "find oneself." But, this is not the case. It is the search itself that must be made meaningful, so dealing (for some) becomes a full-time occupation, and, perhaps needless to say, a way of life.

Hence, as a group the dealers have a high level of awareness of who, what and why the group is. As individuals with separate and unique biographies, the awareness of these same things emerges in a personal style that is consistent with the broadly based youth culture.

One of the visible consequences of ascribing meaning to the search for meaning is that dealers come to see themselves as agents of social change who are helping to bring about a revolution that will see the end of the racist, plastic, up-tight American way of life. This does not mean that they are psychedelic evangelists who are seeking converts on every street corner or on junior high school playgrounds, but rather that they have a conception of themselves that places them in the vanguard, as it were, of a movement to overthrow the established social order. Their primary concern, which shows that their idea of a "revolution" is a mystical one, is that of avoiding copping out, and this is a personal, moral problem rather than a collective or a political one. Still, they see dealing as a form of "non-violent guerrilla warfare" against the police, whom they regard as the enemy, and this perception is reinforced by the highly political portrait of the youth culture, which is represented in some of the "underground" tabloids as an oppressed and rebellious class.

Because of all of the "risks" that they take, moreover, dealers tend to think of themselves as persons who are deserving of great honor and special privilege. Hence, they often call attention to the fact that they are bringing a highly desired substance to others with little profit to themselves. On the other hand, however, it is not considered appropriate for them to boast or otherwise to demand high payment in return for what they have done, so the means must be found to exact some form of compensation for their trouble. Since capitalism is generally disapproved of (at least nominally) by the dealers' clientele, it is not possible for a dealer to simply charge high prices for the drugs he or she sells. Instead, dealers expect their customers to show gratitude by offering verbal obeisances or by other means, such as the giving of gifts.

I am speaking here of a special "type" of dealer, of course. Many dealers sell a wide variety of psychedelic and non-psychedelic drugs and apparently do so in order to make a profit. However, the dealers I studied did not fit the popular conception of the dealer as a criminal who is desirous of the opportunity to "hook" innocent victims. On the contrary, the dealers in the "sample" see themselves as "hippies" or "bohemians,"

XUM

not criminals, and the "deviant" behavior that they consider to be legitimate is limited for the most part to the selling of marijuana, hashish, LSD, and other psychedelics. And, despite occasional lapses into "criminality" (occasioned by the incursion into their scene of non-hippie dealers and other criminal types), they refrain from most forms of anti-social behavior. This is not to say, however, that the dealers are frustrated Sunday School teachers, but they might tend to see themselves as equally benign. And, in this context it is interesting to note that they see their acts as harmless on the one hand when the question of whether the police are justified in arresting them arises,and "revolutionary" on the other when outlining their role in bringing about tremendous social change.

It should be apparent, then, that in the dealers' milieux spontaneity plays as important a role as it does in the Church of the Cosmic Liberty. Dealers are expected (and demand of themselves) to improvise a life style that is suited to what they are and what they do. In some cases they define dealing as an art form, and in this sense artistic greatness if equated with social greatness, to use the Hegelian aphorism. Dealers claim to rely on "intuition," as they call it, in order to create a viable business that will support them in a manner to which the youth culture is or would like to become accustomed. Thus, they come to employ a gestural language not unlike that of the spiritual seekers of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty. People, as Mead, Goffman, and others have pointed out, display their intentions in non-verbal as well as in verbal ways, by sitting in a certain manner, by facial movements, by arms, hand, leg, feet, and torso gestures.[5] Dealers, because of the potential threat posed by strangers and outsiders, must learn to assess character in succinct fashion. Guiding their actions is a situationally improvised set of cues, hunches, and intuitions about the identity (that is, the character) of the person who is presenting him or herself as a potential customer. As in the religious setting, the social context in which dealers and customers are brought together is characterized by the elevated emotional state of the actors, and this heightened mood gives the impression (to this observer at least) of being functional to the requirements of both the situation and the needs of the individuals involved. When dealers determine that the person is not who he represents himself to be, then the dealing role is relegated to the background or else abandoned altogether. (I find it interesting that many people find this to be perfectly understandable, as far as dealers are concerned, but nevertheless challenge the "sincerity" of the Cosmic Libertarians who likewise find situational reasons for abandoning the role of devotee.)

Further parallels can be drawn between the social life in the religious sect and social life in the dealing scene. The dealers' professionalism, which is something like perceiving hipness as an occupational calling, is a learned behavior, just as religiosity is learned in the sect. The sale of large amounts of drugs is not so important as is the setting up of deals and the discussion which follows sales, just as specific religious experiences are less significant than the process by which the

XUM

experiences were engendered. Again, group feelings are consistently elevated in both types of settings. And, the question of commitment is something that seldom arises because dealers and religionists alike demand implicit and proverbial faith in the nature of the group experience and enterprise.

Ignoring here the obvious similarities between the Cosmic Libertarian notion of marijuana as a "sacred substance" (a type of _mana_?) and some dealers' belief that marijuana and most psychedelics are at least "psychologically" helpful, and, of course, ignoring the obvious differences between the respective groups' attitudes toward "worldly pleasure," it might be appropriate to conclude that dealers and religionists alike in these two social settings have in common the previously described celebration of a kind of mental mobility--a genuine mentality--that enables them to preserve personal autonomy in their full-time pursuit of community, while at the same time learning the social skills that are pre-requisite to their prolonged participation in the youth culture.

While this discussion of drug dealers has been necessarily limited to few statements about the general life style that individuals improvise, I have tried to make clear that the same generic social processes operate in the sect and in the dealing groups. These social processes insulate the members of both types of improvisational youth groups against internalizing the values of the middle class, adult social order. Dealers, in defining the activities they engage in as self-validating and therefore authentic, effect transformations that produce the psychosocial mobility found among the Cosmic Libertarians.

A final word should be said about the recruitment of drug dealers into the various scenes that can be found in any area where the youth culture is highly visible, such as in the bohemian communities located in the central cities on the east and west coasts. Friendship networks rather than recruitment as such provide dealing groups with sufficient members to successfully undertake such activities and living arrangements as dealing drugs may require. These friendship networks, in time, can become the so-called "extended families."

As for the belief systems of dealers of psychedelic drugs, it can be stated that a great similarity exists between dealers and the Cosmic Libertarians, as well as other "hippie" groups who cultivate this youthful style. Dealers prefer what they term "honesty" in relationships with each other and with customers. They likewise emphasize spontaneity and the expression of emotion over calculation and restrained feelings. Sensuality is seen as the key to the type of freedom that the life of the ideal dealer exemplifies. Dealers like that which is colorful, exciting, and effulgent, and they eschew the sober, the ordinary and the classical. Many dealers described themselves to me as "incurable romantics," and claimed that such an approach to life enables them to cope with the stigma that is attached to their "profession." They recognize no leaders, preferring to follow the dictates of their own conscience. On the other hand, most will testify that they greatly value the solidarity that has been carefully developed in their respective milieux.

XUM

In spite of this solidarity, however, all of these values and beliefs appear to be somewhat fragile in that they can be and often are abandoned whenever it is expedient to do so (usually because of sudden danger of arrest or because they "lose interest" in dealing). What this means is that occasionally dealers cut their hair, momentarily break with their hippie associates, and don the accoutrements of the straight life, at least until the situation is restored to normalcy.

Rock Bands

Groups in which this structural fragility is most apparent today (at least in the youth culture) are those made up of young rock musicians.* For each that makes records and becomes widely known to the general (or even to the youthful) public, there are many, many other bands that form, make music, and then dissolve without having made it into the public's eye. Like dealing groups and the religious sect, the bands generally "recruit" their members from informal friendship networks. Sometimes, when the friendships are particularly strong and the desire to lead the

---

*During my undergraduate years and for a time while I was a graduate student I worked as a rock musician, playing in a number of bands and circulating among a fairly heterogeneous milieu of musicians, record company executives, and employees, and others who, though not directly involved in the music "business" as such, were, nevertheless, a part of the social world of rock and roll. In the next few pages I hope to show how certain features of this social world compare favorably with what I have emphasized about the Cosmic Liberty Church and hippie drug dealing groups.

XUM

musicians' style of life is predominant, the individuals pool their resources and form musical living groups, the ostensible purpose of which is to "make it" in the music business. As in the dealing and religious groups, the emphasis is on spontaneity and improvisation. This is not only incorporated into the musical forms that are created but also reflects the mode of living that is sought after with much quasi-ceremonial zeal. Practice sessions, informal musical "jams," and writing sessions are characterized by the individual's making spontaneous contributions to the group effort. The outcome of these social contexts appears to be the artistic temperament, that highly volatile, highly idiosyncratic manner of relating to the world that is characteristic of many "stars," and which, not incidentally, is akin to the mental mobility of dealers and hip Hindus.

This temperament allows for the individual musician's being relatively idiosyncratic in behavior while only nominally committed to a particular band that he may be playing in. Here the structure of the entertainment industry plays an important role, since the entrepreneurs of leisure are always on the look-out for new talent. Individuals, and not groups, may be approached by record companies, or even by other more stable and popular bands. Hence, individuals readily leave rock groups to which they had previously been "loyal," but they do remain loyal to the spirit or myth in whose name the original group was formed. In the latter groups the myth is redefined or given new expression.

A word of explanation about how this myth is conceived of might be in order. Most rock musicians do not read music, and many, perhaps a majority, have had no formal training.* Hence, in order for music to be created, musicians must work closely together and improvise chords, progressions and rhythms from what each knows how to express on his or her respective instrument. In contexts where such working together is accomplished, tremendous group solidarity is created along with the composition.

Another way of illustrating this point is to describe the tension between work commitments and the hippie notion that work is "square" and dehumanizing. For musicians who adopt the hippie world view this tension is very nearly submerged in a work style that looks like anything but work. In studio recording sessions, for instance, tapes are frequently made while the rock musicians sit and lie on the floor in various attitudes of repose. The engineers busily turn knobs and wire the patch-boards while the musicians laugh, talk, smoke marijuana, and generally appear to have fun. But behind this facade of leisure may be a serious concern for the quality of the musical product. Each musician is expected to learn his part and play it expertly, although the manner in which it is learned and the attitude with which it is played may in no way resemble that which would result if the participants in the situation were subscribing

---

*Those musicians who have had formal training are usually attracted to other musical forms, such as classical, jazz, or electronic music. Furthermore, untrained (white) muscians who have attempted to "make it" in the jazz world have been turned into rock musicians in order to get jobs playing. Rock musicians are on the whole less demanding musically and more demanding in respect to personal attainment in the culture.

XUM

less indirectly to the traditional work ethic. Sometimes--this suggests the importance of the tension between work and leisure--the distinction between professional and amateur musicians (made by the musicians themselves) is routinely made on the basis of whether or not one can be a professional (that is, work hard and make quality recordings, or else perform well before audiences) without abandoning the relaxed, hip style. Amateurs, by way of contrast, are those who confuse casualness of work style with the idea that rock music is easy to create, play, and make one a living that allows for conspicuous consumption and high status in the youth culture.

Originality is another value which most rock musicians aspire to, and the idea that the results of group efforts must be "genuine," "spontaneous," or "natural" is closely related to it. But a number of factors militate against the creation of original compositions or, generally speaking, "sounds." These factors are determined in part by the demands of the record companies, radio stations and audiences who expect that orginality will be of a type that is still recognizably "rock and roll." And, because many musicians cannot read music, they must listen to the recordings of others in order to learn how to play their instruments, so original compositions often sound like the available records in the genre. Finally, the technological characteristics of the music industry limit the range of possible stylistic alternatives available to the musicians. (Records must meet certain FCC standards, and so on.) So, one problem that recording creates is that of a differen-

XUM

tiation between live and recorded music. Musicians who record must, once on stage, try to "sound like themselves" without sounding like they are trying to do so, because the hip audience theoretically disapproves of anything other than genuine spontaneity. Here the issue is that of freedom versus control, and this arises in the sect and in the dealing scenes, for whose members originality in religious expression and dealing styles respectively is an important component of group participation and individual character.

Thus, similar social processes are at work in the sect, in drug dealing scenes, and in rock bands, and these processes make life meaningful for the participants, manage tensions that arise as a by-product of everyday life contingencies, and teach the members how to play roles with a sense of inner-detachment.

In the "scenes" thus far described individuals invariably (because of the structural features of group life) find themselves at cross-purposes. The religious devotee who is involved in a series of rituals, who meditates and does his japa dutifully, who exclaims the virtues of the guru and of the religious life in general at every turn, attempts to remove himself from the nexus of his actions. He is doing all of this simply because he is doing it. There is no reason for his actions other than the essential, proverbial reasons that make action what it is and the actor who he is. Thus, in the Cosmic Liberty Church members routinely denigrate the traditional Western religionist (as they conceive of him) because work in the world and religious rituals are done for the sacramental benefit that may accrue for the doer.

The hippie marijuana dealers I interviewed likewise "put down" free enterprise and claim that their own salesmanship is a kind of extra-entrepreneurial sociability. Though dealers sell drugs, they routinely avoid the appearance of engaging in instrumental economic exchanges by defining dealing as a process whereby one becomes hip. Hence, they attempt to establish social ties with those persons in the various youth milieux, ties that are, once again, characterized by essential, character-implicating actions on the parts of the participants. One sells marijuana not for profit, but for fun, not because marijuana is a useful substance, but because marijuana is "where it's at" and because they are groovy, hip people and not ordinary capitalists.

Finally, rock musicians, though they are beseiged by the show business industries, though they must submit to the demands of a profession and become technically competent, often define what they are doing as musicians in much the same way that religionists and dealers climb the mystic and psychedelic heights;"because they are there." Rock musicians, many will tell you, play music because they must, because it is the only thing they can do. The technical requirements, the work-a-day routines, the contracts, the creative and routine instrumentalities of composition, arrangement and practice, are all defined in a context of fun and essential activity that has as its main component the creation of the character of the actors involved.

The point that I am trying to make is that the proper devotee, the hip dealer, and the rock musician qua rock musician are sub-culture heroes in whom the proper balance between essential and instrumental actions is satisfactorily maintained, although the rhetoric of the groups in which these heroes operate emphasizes the expressive. And, I am in effect describing a process of de-alienation, whereby work of any kind which serves counter-culture markets and demands becomes "holy work," (i.e. unalienated) and therefore a legitimate enterprise. One can be engaged in an action that has as its purpose some sort of instrumental outcome (e.g. divine dispensation, the selling of marijuana, the making of a recording), but at the same time he must appear to others that he is performing the action for its own (or his proverbial Self's) sake. Functionally, the maintenance of this balance between the instrumental and essential modes of action (and of interaction, since all of the actions described are normally identified with roles that one plays before others) manages the tension inherent in social contexts characterized by a relative absense of norms and weak relationships. Even in the sect where the members have "lived co-operatively" for a number of years, there are no commitments forthcoming, nor are any expected that would guarantee a member's continued participation. Dealers, too, often opt out on their friends when arrest seems imminent or when dealing loses its authentic aura. And, it is something of a commonplace to mention the rapid dissolution of rock groups due to the changing interests of individual musicians. This is not to say that a great deal of emotion is absent from these scenes where weak relationships and inchoate norms are the rule rather than the exception; on the contrary, they are highly charged emotionally because the character of each actor is implicit in his actions. Whatever one does tells others (as well as him- or herself) what sort of person _qua_ Person one is, and this is the stuff that makes for the generation of tremendous emotional energy.

The members of improvisational youth groups typically do not see themselves as having a history. They believe that it is enough to live in the present. History is dead, a mythical construct that serves no function, and, in fact, detracts from the efficacy of the moment. Next, the improvisational youth group is leaderless, although certain persons, by virtue of their special talents, personalities, and so on, occupy leadership positions and serve as innovators as well as the repositories of the individualistic and collectivist orientations and values. Such groups, moreover, are created in order to fulfill a more or less utilitarian need, although the utilitarian basis may eventually disappear or be relegated to the realm of the insignificant (i.e. to the past). That is, individuals in these groups improvise life styles more or less suitable to the goal they are trying to reach. This goal, to a large extent, is a transcendent one, because it has to do with the elaboration and maintenance of a genuine mentality which in its natural state enables one to do his or her own thing and thereby remain outside the boundaries of adult life. (In the sect this genuine mentality is called "implicit faith" and "Hindu consciousness.") Such a mentality (ideally) has no analogue in the real world; that is, the state of inner subjectivity remains true only to itself, while the outer, objective realm is continually bombarded with ritual acts of mystic propitiation and existential denial. Whenever the world still manages to emerge and impinge on the genuine mentality, it is relativized by the ideological and normative frameworks, which, as I have pointed out, emphasize improvisation and spontaneity. Put simply, the members of improvisational youth groups are "searching" not for values or goals (i.e. objects) but for states (i.e. subjects).

The members of improvisational youth groups, moreover, feel that they must live together in order to make the genuine mentality viable. Living together thus takes on an "essential" character as a main impetus to existence. The right combination of people, it is generally believed in the youth culture, will provide most of the ingredients necessary for a purposeful existence. Individuals who join these groups (or who are recruited) must show others that they are "right on" people, thus the emphasis on socialization in youth culture settings is heavy indeed. In time, each member learns to present an image of him or herself as genuinely serious about searching for the proverbial Self. One is not "into" this (way of life) because of something one wants, but because one is a "beautiful person" incarnate. In this way participation is made into an essential kind of thing, good in and of itself. Instrumental acts are frowned upon, and one must try to do the thing that is required (or that is merely seen as the thing to do) without getting one's character (the ego) involved. Instrumental acts are necessary, however: In the Church of the Cosmic Liberty there are rituals to perform and religious vigils to keep; in the rock and roll bands there are compositions to perfect, deadlines to meet, engagements to keep, fans to please, adults to outrage, fortunes to be made and spent; dealers must make "connections," seek out or simply maintain a hip clientele, etc. All the while rock bands are "into" (involved in) this, the musicians call it "becoming professional," and they allow themselves to be carried along the channels provided by the music and show business industries. Dealers, who are living on the very thin edge of society; that is, who are living as marginal people, have a running game with keeping from becoming criminals. They call this "becoming hip." Those young people who affect their own religious life styles call their involvement "becoming religious" or "getting saved." All of these things, again, are animated by the transcendent subjective state, the proverbial Self which must be searched for, though not necessarily found, at all costs. That this is a definition of human nature characterized by age-homogeneity is self-evident. It is the young for whom identity qua identity is important. Adults have better things to do (or so most of them think) than to search for something that is not likely to be found. The drugs, the religious visions, the artistic productions, the making of the communal scene (self-sufficiency and mellowness) are not really the end-all and be-all of this life style. It is, rather, the life style itself that is important. Everyone involved must believe in the life style qua life style in order for there to be community. But what is community, after all? In these contexts, it is sociability, friendship, and, most of all, that quality of sustained

XUM

social marginality that provides structural supports for the anti-heroic quest. The improvisational youth groups contain the proto-institutional aspects of marginal life styles, and it is within their parameters that the anti-heroic styles of the young are acted out. These improvisational youth groups "carry" the youth culture from adolescence as far into adulthood as they can and make it available to the next generation of the young.

The Institutionalization of the Search for Identity

The existential tensions which I have described in the previous sections have an important cultural source, a source that is not of the Cosmic Libertarians own making. In large part these tensions have to do with the institutionalization of the search for identity in American society, a phenomenon which gives ideological as well as structural support to the by now well-known prolongation of adolescence. That is to say, the problems of identity which the members of the sect, and most other members of the youth culture, are trying to resolve in various ways are created by the society in order to relieve itself of the burden of taking the young into adult institutions at an early age. The young are not only not needed in the labor force, they are actively encouraged to indulge in their supposedly temporary social and economic obsolescence. The rhetoric of self-indulgence can be summed up as the search for identity, and the institutionalization of this search means that searching for one's identity has been imbued with considerable social meaning. Bennett Berger has described the social functions of what he terms the "identity myth" as follows:

> Actually, there are good reasons to believe that in the by now proverbial 'search for identity,' inducing the process of search is sociologically more important than anything one may happen to find along the way. While young persons are discovering that it is important to 'find themselves,' what they are actually learning is that they are immature until they do. And this knowledge performs two very important functions for the emerging social structure. First, it helps accommodate them to their juvenile status and therefore constrains them to keep out of markets and arenas where only the 'mature' belong. In this sense, the theory of the identity crisis is part of the juvenilization process. Second, . . . if identity is inherently something elusive or ungraspable, if the self is an onion rather than a nut, then the most important function performed by institutionalizing the search for something unfindable is to induce the sort of anxiety that promotes the mobility of the psyche. A person who does not know who he is might just be anybody, and hence is fit for the unanticipateable opportunities and eventualities which rapidly changing industrial societies provide.
>
> Moreover, the belief that in finding an identity one creates and becomes oneself, puts a psychological gloss on (and hence reinforces) two of the core values of our culture. It affirms the legacy of liberal individualism which confers upon the person an essential autonomous reality transcending the social categories in terms of which he has his public being. In this sense, an 'identity' is a secular equivalent of a soul or a spirit. Second, the belief in identity search, as an important part of the motivational apparatus inducing persons to reach for achieved statuses, sustains the idea that one makes one's own future. In this sense, the search for identity is implicated in the American search for success.[6]

Hence, again in Berger's terms, "although one is constrained to search, one is constrained not to find . . . but rather to continue searching until one's commitments to and immersion in family, community, and career result in the disappearance of the identity problem--whereupon one may be told that the identity crisis has been resolved."[7]

XUM

But has it? In the Church of the Cosmic Liberty it has not been resolved because the organization of daily life in the sect which members have so self-consciously articulated reinforces the notion that searching for one's identity (the God within) is an implicitly meaningful and rewarding occupation which is worth hanging on to--even at the expense, it need hardly be mentioned, of family, community and career opportunities and ties. The sect not only provides an outlet for the raw emotions and energies that the search for identity releases, but it channels them in a way that the members have apparently found satisfying. The Cosmic Libertarians, it would seem, have found a way to make meaningful the search for identity itself, and this meaningfulness (which is implied in the oceanic group feelings that emerge in the ritualized social contexts of the religiohip life, in their disavowal of the material and social accoutrements of middle class adult existence, in their nominal refutation of rational economics, in their conspicuously inward-looking ideologies, and, finally, in their utter disregard, even contempt, for non-ascriptive statuses and roles--you are what you eat and perhaps even whom you pray to) has awakened a set of character traits and a new mentality that the members nurture and manipulate with considerable social and psychological aplomb.

This means that the societal forces which induced the members of the sect to search for their identities in the first place must reckon, as it were, with an unanticipated consequence; namely, the Cosmic Libertarians' taking seriously--to the point of inner identification, and, of course, social orientation--the whole business of searching for an identity.

Here I do not mean that the identity of the neo-Hindu devotee is in itself completely devoid of traces of American adult normalcy; rather, the manner in which this identity is actualized or borne by the members suggests that the Cosmic Libertarians are far from "normal." In the first place the mobility of their psyches, a trait which is functional in a culture that requires that people become oriented away from kinship groups in order to fulfill the demands of an industrialized and highly mobile social order, appears to exceed certain tolerable limits within which persons can adapt to discomforting social roles and statuses. That is, although the playing of discrepant roles--as Goffman has termed roles that require of those who must play them a self-imposed "tongue-in-cheek" distance which preserves their self-respect and autonomy--is tolerated under certain circumstances, the Cosmic Libertarians apply the tongue-in-cheek rule to nearly every facet of social life, including those "serious" areas such as child-rearing, career planning, voting, and so on.[8] The only thing that is played out with an abiding inner-identification is the aforementioned searching for identity, which is hardly a sufficient--or even necessary--criterion for full participation in the institutional arenas of private and public life. This psychic mobility, moreover, allows the members to orient themselves to the youth culture, which, in spite of its changing character and continually fluctuating membership, represents an inviting arena of sociability and character development where the process of "growing up" can be acted out indefinitely.

Second, the moral energies which have sustained the Church of the

XUM

Cosmic Liberty for five years do not appear to be diminished. Indeed, they have, if anything, increased, and the members, in accumulating expertise in the exercising of their particular form of moral approbation have become, theoretically if not practically, ideological culture-bearers of a substratum of the social order that stands in opposition to dominant cultural norms and values. This means that the Church of the Cosmic Liberty--considered, in S.N. Eisenstadt's terms, as an "adjustive mechanism" that has arisen more or less spontaneously in order to provide an outlet for the moral energies of the young and to direct these energies (and their bearers) into the orbit of the dominant social order--has become, in a word, dysfunctional. It succeeded in keeping the members out of the institutional order and in providing them with something to do while they awaited certification as bonafide adults, but it also changed them to the extent that they want to avoid becoming adults at all, to remain perennially young, and to continue doing, presumably until their lives are over, what they feel young people are supposed to do. Bennett Berger has commented as follows on the "neotenous" effects of the youth culture:

> To the extent that we can conceive of growing up as a career (and in this psychoanalytic age it is not difficult to do so), 'not growing up' (that is, the preservation of the essential features of youth culture in later life) can also be considered as a career. Although there is a certain joylessness in the idea of 'maturity' (identified, as it is, with sober responsibilities and solemn commitments), there are relatively few niches in the adult social structure where 'youthfulness' does not receive severe negative sanctions, and those adolescents whose peer group experience has developed in them trained incapacities for growing up or perhaps even conscientious objections to it may be expected to gravitate toward those niches.[9]

Increasingly we hear of non-institutionalized religion making an impact on the denizens of the youth culture, and it would appear that religious and neo-religious social groups and milieux with highly variant sacred and secular orientations are taking their place alongside the social, cultural and psychic niches provided by bohemian businesses, show business and certain working class occupations by serving as alternative institutions and communities where individuals can be sheltered from the adult world. While these groups can be in part characterized by their meteoric emergence and demise--characterized, in other words, by their built-in vulnerability to the historical and social forces that inevitably lead to their extinction, forces like industrialization, secularization, mobility of population, adolescent prolongation, career and courtship patterns, and all the rest that define our cultural imperatives and that move masses of people and particular individuals--their impact on their members may be momentous. Thus, whether or not the Cosmic Liberty Church itself is viable as an institutional alternative to growing up is of less importance than the fact that its members have in the name of the mentality that the sect embodies been provided with the skills, social contacts, and ideologies to utilize religion as an agent that frees them from the imperatives that constrain most of the people in society from "doing their own thing."

Third, and this is perhaps the most important point that I can make concerning the question of the permanency of the marginal status of the youthful members of the sect, the qualities of persons that the Cosmic

XUM

Libertarians exhibit have taken on a moral imperative, which contributes to the continuing formation of a system of subcultural norms, roles and statuses which are gradually taking over the task of socializing the young, a task that formally characterizes an important role previously played by adults. That is to say, while social experiments often fail, the fact of the experiment is sometimes enough to engender the kind of response described above, a response that a sizable minority of youth are now exhibiting. While it may be premature to point to a "definitive change" in the character of socialization, it would appear that a new Zeitgeist has emerged among youth, a Zeitgeist that is characterized as much by its heterogeneity as by the fact of its emergence. This is obvious to all but a few remaining dwellers in the contemporary Platonic cave. Although the Cosmic Liberty Church does not have the last say on what the spirit of the age is, certain features of the social life that the sect supports embody this new Zeitgeist and contribute to its growth. The sect has enabled its members to make social and psychological mileage out of what Ruth Benedict called "discontinuities in cultural conditioning," and more than that, it has made innovators out of them.[10]

To a certain extent the members of the sect have been duped by Society's demand that they search for their identities until the society is ready to accept them as adults. But this game of duplicity has gone awry because the members no longer want to be adults, and indeed, aren't (or are dedicated to the creation of new models of adulthood). Chronologically, of course, they are, but behaviorally, they are perennial adolescents.

Beyond demonstrating that youthfulness is unevenly distributed in society this shows, I think, the way in which youthfulness can be preserved by social experimentation, by psychological mobility and by ideological reinforcement. Here, then, lies what Gurvitch[10] might call the "total social phenomenon" of the Cosmic Liberty Church: The members of this segment of the youth culture are candidates for permanent outsider status; the period of life they are "going through" is far from "transitional" because the benefits they have accrued in the area of interpersonal relations are functionally connected with their failure to adapt to the instrumental priorities of the adult world.

A good question that can be raised at this point is, "So what? Who needs Cosmic Libertarians anyway?" The answer to this question is obvious, but its simplicity perhaps conceals a very relevant fact that currently counts for much in the world of youth and may in the future mean a lot to adults as well. The society does not need the Cosmic Libertarians in the sense that crucial roles will go unperformed if these particular young people do not wish to (or cannot) play them. But there is in the United States a small "nation" of nearly fifty million persons between the ages of fifteen and thirty.[12] Many of them are likewise "not needed," at least for the moment, because participation in our industrial order requires special training that may take a good ten or possibly more years out of a young person's life before he is ready for a job and the ancillary adult status that accompanies it. Since the process of creating human obsolescence is by and large an unregulated one--since middle-class

XUM

youth are merely told to wait, and perhaps, to search for their identities, until the day comes when they will take the places they have earned--the consequences of this process may likewise be unregulated. If even a fraction of a percent of the young give up on adulthood (or have adults give up on them) before attaining it, the impact of this on the continuity of the society as a whole could be considerable. Assuming that not all of the perennially young could establish themselves in bohemian business, in show business careers, or even in non-institutionalized religion or the few available working class occupations, an unprecedented trend toward downward social and economic mobility could develop (and probably is developing) which would add additional strain to a society already undergoing considerable change and unrest. What I am saying is that the existence of the Cosmic Liberty Church and the type of person involved in it implies that a tear in the social fabric has occurred, and it may not be repaired until the cloth itself is dramatically transformed or discarded altogether. In other words, the maintenance of cultural continuity has become and will likely remain for a long time to come a crucial problem that defies the machinations of even the most resourceful social engineers.

Beyond this consideration lies an important fact, which lends support to the thesis that I am offering about the changing character of the social order. The viability of the youth culture is to some extent a result of the reluctance (or inability) of the dominant culture to woo its erstwhile

XUM

marginal members into society as fully participating adults. Under these conditions, a subculture can move into the breach. Subcultures in general and the youth culture in particular tend to enclose their members, and the extent of this enclosure has long been understood as a consequence of their success. The Church of the Cosmic Liberty represents--in a miniaturized form--such a subculture. Considering the enormous numbers of young people who are involved in the youth culture, a systematic or even random and unwitting exclusion from participation in adult institutions can become the stuff that revolutions are made of. In all likelihood, such a revolution, if it were to occur, would not see the Cosmic Libertarians in the "vanguard" (they are content to meditate, as it were), but without the disruption of cultural continuity that the life-style of the Cosmic Libertarians (and their counterparts in the youth culture) implies, such a revolution would be exceedingly short-lived and probably unsuccessful. The images of kings fall, as Peter Berger says, before their thrones do, and the disposition toward remaining a permanent member of the youth culture may considerably disrupt the sequence of birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age and death.[13]

This is, I think, a good place to end this study, although there are numerous unanswered questions that have been raised in the course of the entire, but especially the foregoing, discussion. My task, however, was simply to explore a phenomenon called the Church of the Cosmic Liberty and to try to understand what it was. It turned out to be, on close examination, a manifestation of coherent social disequilibrium that

XUM

utilized improvisation as an acculturating or an accommodating mechanism in the members' post-adolescent "moratorium." Each situation which I explored, each social role and context and ideology that was discussed pointed in the direction of the institutionalization of the search for identity, toward making meaningful the search for meaning. And, the effects of prolonged immersion in this matrix of experience provided the members with a kind of mobility of mentality (or of psyche) that is perhaps unprecedented--unless we consider it to be similar to the mentalities of the French revolutionaries who, when daily events turned the political and social tides now this way and now that, became extremely fluid in their outlooks in order to avoid being guillotined by whomever happened to be in power at the moment. The sect, I tried to point out, was a typical social experiment in the contemporary youth culture, and one could reasonably expect similar results from the study of rock and roll bands, communes, underground press offices, drug dealing groups, and from the many other forms of improvisational youth groups. The tensions manifested in the youth culture (that is, in the improvisational groups that form the structural supports for the youth culture) are dialectical: They exhibit the tendency for the society to demand career orientations from youth at the same time that youth are supposed to trivialize and "juvenilize" themselves with a fruitless (from the adult standpoint) search for an ethereal identity; they underscore the cultural discontinuities and social cleavages that have become generic to the industrialized super-society; they poignantly display the tremendous energies of youth as they are expended in individual and collective parrying with elusive societal, psychic and moral windmills.

Footnotes to Chapter V

1. For a readable overview of deviant religious subgroups in America, see Richard Mathison, Faiths, Cults and Sects of America. The most expansive bibliographic resource on world cult, sect and religious movements (including those in America) is Weston La Barre's, "Materials for a History of Studies of Crisis Cults: A Bibliographic Essay," Current Anthropology, Vol. 12, No. 1 (February, 1971), pp. 38-44.

2. The term "juvenilize" was coined by Bennett Berger to provide a conceptual referent for the process whereby the chronologically youthful are made or kept socially young by the (adult) society. See Bennett Berger, Looking for America, p. 101.

3. S. N. Eisenstadt, From Generation to Generation. See Chapter IV for a discussion of the types of "deviant" and "functional" age groups, pp. 269-323.

4. Joseph Damrell, "The Dealer."

5. See, for example, Erving Goffman, Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1961); Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality (New York: Doubleday and Co., Anchor Books, 1969); and, George Herbert Mead, Mind, Self and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

6. Bennett M. Berger, Looking for America, pp. 96-97.

7. Bennett M. Berger, Looking for America, pp. 90-91.

8. Erving Goffman, Encounters, "Role Distance," pp. 85-152.

9. Bennett M. Berger, Looking for America, p. 77.

10. Ruth Benedict, "Continuities and Discontinuities in Cultural Conditioning."

11. An analysis of Gurvitch's concept of the "total social phenomenon" appears in Phillip Bosserman, Dialectical Sociology: An Analysis of the Sociology of Georges Gurvitch (Boston: Porter Sargent, Extending Horizons Books, 1968), pp. 81-140.

12. The number of persons between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine in 1970 was 48,918,362 or 24.1% of the entire United States population. See General Population Characteristics: United States Summary, "1970 Census of Population," (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census: January, 1972), 1-263. [Publication no. PC(1)-B1]

XUM

13. Peter L. Berger, Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., Anchor Books, 1963), p. 130.

APPENDIX I

BIOGRAPHIES OF SOME INNER AND OUTER CIRCLE MEMBERS

Shivadas, age 30, was born in Indiana to working class parents. A young tough with a penchant for beating up members of rival gangs in nearby towns, his teachers singled him out as an exemplary student. On graduation from high school, he won a university scholarship. He spent six years in college, earning a Master's degree in the Humanities. His college years were punctuated with trips into the Kentucky hills where he learned blue-grass music. He later played his guitar and sang at coffee houses in Indiana and Illinois. On graduating, he accepted a teaching position offered him by a college in California where he was quickly accepted into the local bohemian fringe. While an instructor, he continued to play guitar and sing in local coffee houses, in addition to occasionally supplementing his income by selling marihuana and other psychedelic drugs. When his tenure expired, he moved to a city on the coast of California with his newly acquired common law wife (Peaches), where he continued to deal drugs for two years. Then, when his operation was closed down by the police, he moved to urban Los Angeles to pick up where he had left off. In 1967, he got the idea of founding the Chruch of the Cosmic Liberty from reading about Tim Leary's adventures with the League for Spiritual Discovery. He became a self-proclaimed director and minister, performing weddings for hippie couples, counseling the spiritual

XUM

woes of wayward youth, and otherwise setting himself up as a religious super-star, who was looked up to by some disaffected youths in the area, and, of course, by the other founders.

Peaches, age 24, was born in a Northern California urban center where she spent an uninspired childhood with her parents, who were a car salesman and secretary, respectively. On graduation from high school, she attended the college where Shivadas taught, fell in love with him, moved into his apartment, and dropped out from her studies. Interested in the plastic arts, she spent her days making decorations for her home, as well as playing nurse-maid for the many wayward youth that Shivadas took under his wing. She claims to have had a strict religious upbringing in a Catholic faith, but found it useless in solving her problems when she attained maturity. Whatever she lacked in terms of friendships and direction, she no longer lacked when she became intimate with Shivadas, who had a wide assortment of friends, and who paid a great deal of attention to her. In the sect, she is a kind of counselor to the other women, who come to her for all manner of advice.

Sheryl, age 27, was California born and raised in the Jewish tradition. She received some attention as a youngster because of her precocious intelligence, and later graduated from a California university with a degree in Social Science. She was an early mover in the hippie scene, and went on escapades with Ken Kesey's pranksters. Later, she moved to a bohemian community in Northern California where she met Shivadas and

Peaches, and began dealing drugs with them. A persistant problem, her obesity, seemed to recede in importance, because her new friends didn't hold this against her. Thus, when they moved to Southern California, she did likewise. She had a baby by a man selected from several she knew. Her mother constantly interferes in her life, and this is a continuing source of irritation for her. Her religious commitment is profound, and she has been called a "nun" in the sect, in spite of her occasional affairs with various young mem whom she picks up in the area. She has been arrested at least three times for dealing and possesing drugs. She currently works as an artist's model and as a secretary in a pool, while raising her daughter.

Fred, age 40, is (to me) the most obscure member of the sect. He is a dynamic leader with a history of involvement in the beatnik scene in the 1950's, and the hippie movement in the 1960's. As a goldsmith he makes a good living, and supports several members of the sect. He is a large man with a long pony tail that hangs to his waist. His religious involvement began with his home life -- about which he says precious little -- and turned into a search for the "true religion." He cultivated many offbeat religionists in Southern California, finally inviting a medium to move into his home. He told me that he has worked in carnivals, in the recording studios -- he is an accomplished cellist -- and "just about everywhere else." He met Shivadas in his shop, when the later was attracted by the religious jewelry in the window. The two became fast friends in a very short time, and decided to deal drugs together. Fred was one of the founders of the sect, and is still called a "director."

Verna, age 38, is an artist with a bohemian flair, who has been married to Fred for around ten years. I know little about her background, except that she is from California originally, and has been trained in arts and crafts. Her role as a co-director is nominal. However, she is a favorite of the others because of her continuing regard for beautifying the site of the church with her art work. She collects antiques, and has two show dogs. According to others, she is the creative force behind the shop that she and her husband maintain.

Rose Marie, age 25, is an enigmatic creature with a child, who was born as a result of rape. Rose Marie has a long history of involvement in the hippie scene, including residence in communes, and participation in folk music circles as a kind of groupie. She came to the sect in 1969, having met the members when they were dealing psychedelic drugs. An early convert to pentecostal faiths, she later abandoned this in favor of Hindu mysticism, finally joining the sect and the Vedanta Society. She is deeply involved in the occult, particularly astrology, and is called the "church astrologer," a title of derision, since the members think astrology is "hocus-pocus," The whereabouts of her family is not known to the researcher, and she refused to discuss the matter whenever I brought up the subject.

Mike and Tina, age 27 and 23, respectively, came to the sect in 1970, after Mike had served time for desertion from the U.S. Army. Both are nominally committed to the sect, relying more on their friendship with the members than on their religious fervor to gain status in the group.

They have a child, age 2, whom they believe to be an incarnation of the Divine Mother (Kali). Mike is a craftsman, who is adept at photography, and is also employed as a road manager for a folk singer. Tina is a chronic complainer who enjoys little rapport with the other women, although most profess to liking her because she is quiet, generous and "spiritually minded."

Alice, age 32, and Tom, age 35, are original founders, who have come and gone several times. They have three children, two of whom were once taken away from them by the county because of drug arrests. Alice is the epitome of the hippie earth mother. She wears lots of jewelry and flowing garments. Tom is a bohemian type who comes and goes as he pleases, usually ambulating between California and Mexico. He has been arrested several times for drug dealing. He is barely tolerated by the sect members, while Alice is very popular with the others. Their children are precocious and lively, and are being taught the finer points of hipdom. Alice was once sent on a "pilgrimage" to India and to Jerusalem by the group with the understanding that she would return with hashish. She returned empty-handed, however.

Rob, age 27, and Sarah, age 26, have similar backgrounds. Both are the children of college professors, and have a penchant for the arts and literature. Rob is a poet who graduated from college, and attended graduate school for one year in the midwest before dropping out. Sarah never graduated from college, but she is an accomplished hard-line artist (graphics). Both have been involved in the drug culture for a long time, until recently when they found the sect to be an alternative to herion and amphetamine addiction. Sarah once had a baby, which the two of them gave up for adoption. Sarah is also an astrologer, and reader of Tarot cards. Rob is content to work in various odd jobs, while he is working on his poetry. They are intermittent members of the inner circle, being more involved with the Vedanta Society where Sarah aspires to become a nun. They are now seperated.

Brother Dick, age 25, was one of the original members of the sect, who later joined a monastery of Hindu persuasion (the Self Realization Fellowship, not the Vedanta group). He was a longtime pursurer of the hippie nomadic existence, living out of the back of his converted milk truck. A very quiet, contemplative individual with an interest in the occult and "all things religious." He is one of the most religiously involved persons, other than the two directors. Little has been seen of him since his becoming a monk, since he is required to be in residence at the monastery.

Brother Vic, age 19, is a new-comer (1970) to the sect. Actually, he is only a nominal member, since he is being readied for monkhood at the Vedanta Society. He usually shows up at religious functions at the sect, where he is given special status as a spiritual seeker. He, apparently, has not been to college, but his command of religious eschatology is considerable. He seldom looks into the eyes of those he talks

XUM

to, and is generally taken to be an inward sort of person with few wordly hangups.

Jason, age 30, is a folk guitarist who occasionally hangs around the sect, and is considered by others to be an absentee member. He often donates the procedes of his musical recordings and concerts to the group, but he professes little faith in the particulars followed by the others. In 1971, he employed Shivadas as a bookkeeper, Sheryl as a secretary and Mike as a road manager.

Nancy, age 40, is a diabetic housewife of an insurance salesman, and is a member of the outer circle. She regularly attends sect functions, and corners whoever will talk to her about her numerous physical ailments. Her husband, age 45, occasionally attends functions with her, but he is quite suspicious of the group, although he attempts to be congenial.

Harry, age 45, and Maggie, age 38, are both members of the outer circle, and have a long history of involvement with occult groups and offbeat religions. They occasionally donate money to the sect, since they admire the "youngsters." They are both very congenial, and quite openly espouse their faith in the Hindu interpretation of life. Although, they are not particularly religious, they are vegetarians, and claim to be believers.

APPENDIX II

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Between 1967 and 1971 I spent nearly twenty weeks in Venice and Santa Monica areas of Los Angeles studying forty or so young, self-styled Hindus, who collectively refer to themselves as the Church of the Cosmic Liberty. Founded in 1967 as a sect dedicated to the legalization of marijuana and other psychedelic drugs, and to the religious conversion of hippie youth, the Cosmic Liberty Chruch gradually took on an introversionist character based on gnosticism, asceticism and, to a lesser degree, adventism.[1] Far from attempting to become predominantly pietistic and world-rejecting, however, the members of the sect improvised a life style that is defined in part by a combination of traditional Hindu religiosity and contemporary hippie esthetics, pratices and beliefs. The members, I learned, place great emphasis on idiosyncratic religiosity, and it was with this improvisational aspect of social life in mind that I undertook to examine its internal and external organization, and to explore the relationship between the social processes of the sect and those found in the culture of youth from which it drew, and continues to draw, its core members.

The method I employed in the study of the Cosmic Libertarians involved me in face-to-face encounters with them. As they engaged in the business of achieving God-realization, I attempted to share their concerns, participate in their formal and informal activities as much as my nominal-member status would allow and otherwise take my place alongside them as they were acting out the events and situations of daily life. This method is broadly known as participant-observation, and is defined by Florence R. Kluckhohn as:

> ...conscious and systematic sharing, insofar as circumstances permit, in the life-activities and, on occasion, in the interests and affects of a group of persons. Its purpose is to obtain data about behavior through direct contact and in terms of specific situations in which the distortion that results from the investigator's being an outside agent is reduced to a minimum.[2]

Howard S. Becker defines participant-observation in the following manner:

> By participant observation we mean that method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people over some length of time. . . He [the participant-observer] watches the people he is studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He enters into conversation with some or all of the participants in these situations and discovers their interpretations of the events he has observed.[3]

Although numerous articles and a few books on participant-observation methodology have adequately defined the purpose of this approach, few specific guidelines or procedures for the conduct of this type of research have been forthcoming in the past decade.[4] Indeed, most writers on the subject ultimately advise the participant-observer to use his own judgement, to play the sociological inquiry by ear, and otherwise to improvise field techniques that will yield the best information on a given subject. In other words, the only way to study social phenomena via the participant-observation methodology is to simply immerse oneself in a milieu.

My involvement with the Cosmic Liberty Church depended in part on my being accepted by the members as a fellow "spiritual aspirant." In spite of the fact that most of the members knew that my interest in them was not religious, but was, rather, professional in origin, they tended to accept my presence as an observer on the condition that I display idiosyncratic symptoms of spiritual readiness. As long as I appeared interested in the Church of the Cosmic Liberty for its own sake, everything went smoothly, but if I behaved as though I wanted information for some instrumental purpose, I would be censured in some way or the social context would be rapidly changed. Thus, whenever my sociological interests became apparent, whether directly as I asked questions that people felt were "none of [my] business," or indirectly, as a result of the outsider's demeanor that I occasionally displayed, I was subjected to benign, albeit serious criticism. At first I found that in order to remain unobtrusive and to keep my "worldliness" fairly well concealed, I merely had to keep quiet, since this allowed people to define me as they would, according to their way of viewing things. I should mention, too, that many "hip groups" reveal an ambivalence toward the presence of researchers which they resolve by letting themselves believe that his presence is consistent with their own purposes. Ultimately, many members came to believe that "the Lord wanted [me] to be in [their] midst, whether [I] was aware of it or not." Moreover, since I was able in time to make friends with most of the members of the "inner circle" of the sect, my presence at rituals and other formal and informal gatherings was seldom questioned -- if I was present, then I was supposed to be. Arthur Vidich's comment's seem particularly relevant to this point:

> In every case the field worker is fitted into a plausible role by the population he is studying and within a context meaningful to them. There seem to be no cases where field workers have not found a basis upon which subjects could react toward them. This is true even in the face of tremendous language barriers. Moreover, the necessary images and the basis for reaction which they provide are not only always found, but they are demanded by the mere fact of the research worker's intrusion into the life of his subjects.[5]

In the course of time, I was able to be more open, and as a result of this I was regarded by a few members of the sect as a kind of pitiable ne'er-do-well who couldn't find it within himself to be committed to leading a religious life. Still, I was humored and tolerated, although some members of the sect felt that I was somewhat of a nuisance. At times it seemed that it was all I could do to achieve a kind of precarious balance between the role of interfering outsider on the one hand, and contributing nominal member on the other.

Furthermore, it became apparent to me in the course of carrying out my research that in order to communicate effectively with my subjects and to keep abreast of happenings that occupied much of their time, I would have to undergo a number of personal changes. About such changes Severyn T. Bruyn has commented that:

> While the traditional role of the scientist is that of a neutral observer who remains unmoved and unchanged in his examination of phenomena, the role of the participant observer requires sharing the sentiments of people in social situations, and thus he himself is changed as well as changing to some degree the situation in which he is a participant. However, researches have found that although he becomes changed through his participation, it is important that part of him remain unchanged and detached. Although 'sharing' the experience, he is not entirely of it.[6]

XUM

In the first place I had only a dim awareness of what the consequences of leading a religious life actually entailed. The members of the sect continually looked to me for signs that I was capable of conducting myself in the manner they deemed appropriate. Rather than attempting to feign a spiritual outlook, I instead attempted to acquire a sensitivity to those experiences and phenomena that the religionists I was studying deemed important. Second, my manner of relating to people was not of much use in this particular setting. Most of my friends are intellectuals who are adept at dealing in abstractions, making reference to this or that fund of scholarly knowledge, discussing current events, and keeping an eye on various social and cultural phenomena and life in the academic milieu. In the Cosmic Liberty Church, though a great deal of emphasis is placed on the individual's awareness of Eastern eschatology, as I have shown, the most mundane sort of topic is always underscored with a religious or quasi-religious sentiment, and the only type of knowledge or experience that is ultimately worthy of being shared is that which is acquired directly and can be perceived by the participants in any given situation as having immediate, sacred value. Thus, in order to derive the fullest benefit from face-to-face encounters with members of the sect, I had to accumulate from memory and imagination a ready reserve of significant experiences and "vertical knowledge" that had a distinctly mystical flavor.

What I am saying is that in order to perform my role adequately as a participant observer, I had to go beyond mere posturing, and actually accede to some of the demands of the type of social life found in the sect. Although I found that it was fairly easy to mimic the language, the social conventions and the interests of my subjects, such activity on my part did little to assure me a proper vantage-point in the milieu from which I could make sociological sense out of what was going on. Not only was it apparent to everyone concerned that I was "different" (even though I learned to display the proper religious accoutrements, and make the requisite obeisances at the appropriate moment), this "difference" entitled me to a special identity in the sect, an identity about which I had to be cautious if I was to be in, but not of the social life of my subjects. In other words, my participation accrued a positive valence, and I could not remain neutral or evasive in the presence of others. Rather, I had to be a "person" in the fullest sense of the term, a person with his own concerns, involvements, aspirations, and hang-ups.

The members of the sect are highly visible to one another, and even the most trivial actions, mannerisms, and behaviors are viewed as character-implicating; that is, they are indicative of "where one's head is at." When people felt that I was "coming from a bad place" (even if it was no particular "place" at all), I was told about it, and it became problematic in the situation in which the subject arose. When I tried to mask my feelings or make religious small-talk, I found myself on shaky ground, so I had to bare myself to others, and simply "allow" them to find a way that they could take me for granted.

In time, of course, I learned that others "made mistakes," too, and since they were not escorted to the door, so to speak, I allowed myself to venture forth into areas in which my familiarity was virtually nonexistent, and to deal with occasional conflicts as they arose. This was especially true with respect to my lack of awareness of the proper decorum that the sect members followed in their religious ceremonies, such as meditation and the like. Once, I came under particularly intense criticism for having fidgeted and squirmed a great deal during a fairly long meditation. I was not only accused of having "body consciousness," instead of a devotional attitude, but a few members entertained fears that I simply "was not ready for spiritual practices". On another occasion I innocently sniffed a bouquet of flowers that a member of the sect was preparing to offer to Kali, the Divine Mother of Hinduism. Although I talked her out of doing so, she nearly threw the flowers in the garbage, for I had "thoroughly desecrated them." On still another occasion, my nose got me into more trouble when I inhaled a cloud of incense that hung over the sect's main shrine. A member who witnessed my disgraceful act remarked, "I thought you knew better . . . that incense is for the Lord!" And, I can recall when I took a hasty sip of wine that had been placed before me during a ritual feast. One of the directors of the "church" held his glass in the air, chanted something in Sanskrit, and then turned to me and said in a contemptuous tone, "We always offer red wine to Mother Kali."

My purpose in offering these illustrations is to emphasize the point that in my role as a participant observer I could not legitimately posture as an innocent among adepts. On the contrary, it was necessary for me to suspend belief in my own version of common sense, and find a new perspective which would enable me to construct the common ground on which I hoped to "relate" to the members of the sect. In phenomenological writings, such a suspension is called epoche, or the "phenomenological reduction." As Alfred Schutz has said:

> The phenomenologist does not deny the existence of the outer world, but for his analytical purpose he makes up his mind to suspend belief in its existence -- that is, to refrain intentionally and systematically from all judgements related directly or indirectly to the existence of the outer world.
>
> What we have put in brackets is not only the existence of the outer world, along with all the things in it, animate and inanimate, including our fellow-men, cultural objects, society and its institutions. Also our belief in the validity of our statements about this world and its content, as conceived within the mundane sphere, has to be suspended. Consequently, not only our practical knowledge of the world but also the propositions of all the sciences dealing with the existence of the world, all natural and social sciences, psychology, logic and even geometry -- all have to be brought within the brackets . . . In performing the phenomenological reduction [or leap], I have to suspend belief also in my mundane existence as a human being within the world. Thus the process of reduction transcends the world in every respect, and the reduced sphere is in the very meaning of the word a transcendental one, or in the well-understood meaning of the word, an aprioristic one.
>
> What remains after the performance of the transcendental reduction is nothing less than the universe of our conscious life, the stream of thought in its integrity, with all its activities and with all its cogitation and experiences (both terms being used in the broadest -- the Cartesian -- sense, which includes not only perceptions, conceptions, judgements, but also acts of will, feelings, dreams, fantasies, etc.)[7]

Thus, for the sociologist the consequences of epoche are profound, for not only do they admit of a diminution of the distance between the observer and the observed which is regarded as crucial in traditional scientific work, they tend to promote the dissolution of the researcher's intellectual categories and place him in a kind of epistomological limbo where everything makes a peculiarly banal kind of sense. Addressing themselves to this methodological dilemma of detachment vs. involvement, Morris and Charlotte Schwartz have said:

XUM

> The issue is not whether [the observer] will become emotionally involved, but rather the nature of the involvement. The involvement, whether it is closer to one end of the continuum (sympathetic identification) or the other end (projective distortion), is very little a function of the observer's role. Rather, it is primarily a function of his experience, awareness, and personality constellation and the way these become integrated with a particular situation . . . Sympathetic identification includes empathic communication and imaginative participation in the life of the observed through identification and role taking. In this type of involvement the observer is both detached and affectively participating; he feels no need to moralize or judge the interaction; his attitude is one of interested curiosity and matter-of-fact inquiry directed toward understanding the observed.[8]

In practice, therefore, that is, in the field where participation and observation acquire this special relationship to one another, out of the epistomological limbo evolves a disposition to "take the role of the other" in the fullest meaning of the phrase. As a consequence, the sociological imagination is directed toward the understanding of the routine meanings that actors ascribe to their experiences, and to the processes by which situations acquire their fundamental definitions and actors their identities. Hence, the observer discovers that social reality is reduced to its basic elements and the existentiality of those elements is charged with a manifest simplicity which the observer can experience at first hand.

What this means in the context of the present study is that in attempting to discover what it is like to be a member of the sect, I chose to "bracket the world" of my familiar experience, to look at my own basic attitudes, desires and assumptions about the world from the point of view of their artificiality and abstractness. Alfred Schutz's statement implies that making the phenomenological reduction manifests itself as a form of self-discipline that requires that one puzzle over the most mundane, ordinary, and seemingly innocuous dimensions of everyday common sense in order that the observer may transcend the scientific, logical, psychological limitations that they necessarily impose upon the mind, and, by definition, upon philosophical and scientific inquiry.[9] When the members of the Cosmic Liberty Church noticed that I was exercising this practical restraint on my way of looking at the world in general, and at their social setting, in particular, that I wasn't attempting to categorize their actions, and that I was acquiring a sensitivity, however secular, for their religious concerns, they determined that a common ground existed on which we could encounter one another and find a degree of mutual accord. In fact, once when I was discussing my sociological perspective with a sect member who wondered how I was viewing the milieu, another member who overheard my remarks about the "phenomenological leap" said, "Oh, that's just something like yoga, only he's afraid to admit it." At any rate, I came to empathize with the Cosmic Liberty Church and attempted to see reality as it is seen in the sect. As Bruyn has said:

> In his scientific role the participant observer is seeking to apprehend, register, interpret, and conceptualize the social facts and meanings which he finds in a prescribed area of study. He is interested in the people as they are, not as he thinks they ought to be from some standard of his own; he is interested in the uniformities of their culture, in their existent, predictable state of being. To achieve these ends he finds his cultural role an indispensible part of the process.
>
> He finds that only by coming to know people personally can he achieve his scientific aims. In his cultural role he becomes involved, but his procedures, his hypotheses, his experimental design, his social role remain objectively recorded. They are not so rigidly fixed that they cannot be changed. As with all experimental work if he finds that any one of these elements is not broadly enough conceived to encompass the data, he refocuses, reformulates his project in whatever way he finds advisable. He assumes he can do this without ignoring the interests of the people he is observing or the standards of his own research.[10]

In other words, while this special kind of practical Verstehen guided my research efforts, I found that I could "make sense" of situations that would have puzzled or perhaps eluded me altogether had I not attempted to forgo many of my preconceptions about social and religious life. (Not unlike Max Weber, I have a religious "tin ear.") In particular, had I not looked more closely at the functional significance of role distance and role changing in the sect, I might have labeled the Cosmic Libertarians "phonies." Thus, I have come to see this aspect of participant observation research as crucial to the understanding of social phenomena. Bruyn has more to say about this:

> The traditional empiricist sets up many preconceptions of his subject through his study of background materials, his definition of variables, his hypotheses, and the causal order he expects to find among his variables. The phenomenologist and the participant observer, on the other hand, tend to let the variables define themselves in the context of the research. And they examine causal relations between these variables on the basis of the social perception of the subject's themselves. The emphasis of the phenomenologist and the participant observer is upon following those procedures which best allow the subjects to speak for themselves in contrast to the traditional empiricist who emphasizes procedures which help explain the subjects from an independent standpoint.[11]

Moreover, had I merely dodged the question of actual participation by circumscribing in some manner or other the boundaries of social life in the sect, I doubtlessly would have been oblivious to, not to mention excluded from, elements that comprise its improvisational character. For example, although the language of the religious devotee is not difficult to learn, it is quite important that the manifest, though sometimes obscure, intentionality of the consciousness that the language affirms be consistent with the quality and quantity of experiences in daily life.

I learned this indirectly by listening to a conversation between a member of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty and a member of a Sikh group that is active in the area. The young Sikh waxed long and eloquent about the progress he was making in spiritual life, about the meaning of the religious experience, and about how the "hand of the Divine" was evident in this and that. I was certainly impressed by his sincerity, but after the person had gone home, Shivadas, his partner in the conversation, accused him of being "full of shit," as evidenced by the "untogether" state of his mind. I learned from Shivadas that even though the Sikh had said all the appropriate things in the highly expressive language of the religionist, and though, seemingly, "his heart was in the right place," he had not attained a meritorious level of spirituality. Beyond the obvious implication that the ideologies of the two members of rival religious sects had collided with one another in this encounter was the notion that a special mode of consciousness was, for Shivadas, the primary index of intense religious devotion and mystical attainment. Since Shivadas could not detect the presence of this consciousness in the Sikh, the latter was not worthy of being taken seriously. From this I learned that not only was a member of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty required to act differently and see things in a different light than the ordinary person, he also had to show others that he could think in a special way. (A "special mode of consciousness" is important precisely because it is subjectively arbitrary -- if I say you haven't *got* it, then you haven't and nobody can prove the contrary.)

XUM

Because I never became religious in the course of my research, I perhaps never acquired the capacity for the mode of consciousness to which the members of the sect are in varying degrees quite attuned, but I did attempt to come to grips with what was meant by the member's references to it, and I remained in constant anticipation of those moments when I was confronted with it.

No doubt the consciousness I am making reference to is the source of the religious experience in the Cosmic Liberty Church, and the extent to which it is developed is directly related to the members' conception of reality, the problem most relevant to my research. Beyond the "merely" religious in the daily lives of the members of the sect, which, again was achieved in part by my having suspended my own common sense notions about the world in general, and life in the sect in particular, and in part by my acquiring a special intimacy with several roles that I played as a nominal member of the milieu, I was able to relate directly to the things that the people in the Cosmic Liberty Church deem important. Thus, not only was I concerned with the external aspects of social life, but also with the inner perspectives of individual members. This is one way in which the sociologist can learn how things his subjects see as reality are real in their consequences. In a sense, such an approach merely requires that one sensitize oneself to the banal, to use Matza's phrase, but in the course of my study of the Cosmic Liberty Church I was to discover that what is called banal is itself subject to situational variation.[12]

I learned that the whimsical sniffing of flowers could invoke an angry religious sanction, that the pleasant odor of incense was not intended for olefactory enjoyment, the wine was not drunk for its soporific effects but for spiritual purification, and finally, that life in the sect is directed toward the evolution of a mode of consciousness, the possession of which places one firmly within the religious sphere, and as a consequence, eradicates every vestige of "worldliness" that tenaciously hangs on in the "normal" individual.

The members' own ideas about an evolving consciousness of individual and group spirituality created a special problem for me as a researcher in their milieu. In the first place, there was no one set of rules I could learn that would enable me to participate in an unobtrusive manner in group activities. Indeed, the members could not elaborate on the rules that one is expected to follow in the Cosmic Liberty Church. Most of the people I asked about this were of the opinion that rules _per se_ are detrimental to the religious life. I was told many times that one should follow the dictates of one's own Inner Self. Without such an authority to guide my sociological research, I instead tried to make sense out of what was going on in typical situations where sect members encountered one another and the world around them. What I learned was that the rules of proper behavior changed with each variation in the group's spiritual consciousness; the more religious people became, the more strict were the rules. On the other hand, however, this feeling of religiosity was often situational, so a rule could be a rule at one moment, and then be the proverbial exception in the next. (Sometimes, for instance, it was appropriate to comment on the pleasantness of the aroma of smouldering incense or of a bouquet of flowers, while at other times it was considered to be a mild heresy.) Thus, in order to carry out my research I had to learn the subtle variations in spiritual sentiment that continually flowed and ebbed from situation to situation,and, at the same time, I had to discern how seriously such variations were taken by the members. In time, however, I was to learn that inconsistency itself in the enforcement of religious or social sanctions was subject to its own kind of consistency, which depended on the members' definition of the intensity of spiritual consciousness at a particular moment.

Although little benefit was derived from attempting to learn what to do in a specific situation, I was able to increase my knowledge of the motivations of sect members by paying attention to what they were reading. Most of the members studied the traditional texts of Hinduism, including the **Upanishads**, the Bhagavad Gita, and so on. When rules or sanctions became the subject of controversy, members invariably attempted to invoke the moral hegemony of scripture or that of their "chosen ideal," Sri Ramakrishna, of whom they are "devotees." I found that I was expected to know, for instance, how to relate the serious as well as the mundane aspects of daily living to what Ramakrishna said on the matter, or how such a topic was treated in the scriptures. Although my expertise was far from erudite, I was able to acquire enough information to allow for a successful general orientation.

XUM

In specific situations, however, I had to settle for being continually "one-upped."[13]

In order to make up for my lack of familiarity with religion in general, I studied the extant literature on sects and cults and learned that the study of cult movements has been greatly hampered by an inordinate amount of attention being given to causal explanations of origins. Whether they are seen as arising as a result of culture contact, culture stress, economic deprivation, collective autism brought about by cultural neuroses, or some other particularistic notion--cults, sects, and other religious movements cannot be explained (and thereby "explained away") by reference to single causes or by the use of typologies of classification. In the first place, such approaches invariably rely upon a concept of culture that is far from flexible, and hence, they tend to place an empirically dynamic movement into a static theoretical framework. Indeed, elements of single-cause explanations -- whether they are predominantly psychological, economic, historical, militaristic, or nationalistic -- apply to nearly all known cults, sects, and other social movements, both sacred and secular.

Second, culture is as much an internal as an external phenomenon. The extant theories or pseudo-theoretical explanations of the causes of the "cultic response" in a culture are decidedly biased in the direction of the external. This means that such theories result from the ethnocentrism of the sociologist, psychologist, anthropologist or historian making the investigation, some of whom remain undaunted by the fact that there is no one statement of causes that will "save the data" and thereby enable the researcher to subsume all of the cults, sects, and religious movements under a single theoretical or typological rubric.

According to Weston La Barre, a general theoretical and empirical interest in the idea of social process as such has transformed the entire field of studies in change, acculturation and culture-diffusion. What was formerly the study of isolated, undiluted, primitive tribes or whole peoples is now the study of an ever-broadening range of socio-cultural phenomena in the context of disintegrating cultures and emerging societies. This change in orientation is due primarily to the fact that the expansion of Western civilization pushed empirical studies into the uncharted areas of those phenomena that were fairly well known, while at the same time making the discovery of the proverbially innocent primitive groups increasingly unlikely. Hence, the most dramatic setting for the study of acculturation and social change is that of the crisis cults, the new, projective sacred systems which arise with sufficient frequency to keep a small army of social scientists, clergymen, journalists, and military chieftans occupied. In the past three decades research has been conducted on crisis cults in every area of the world.

Pioneering efforts by Herskovits, Redfield, Margaret Mead, and others inaugerated this problem-oriented research which sought explanations of the relationship between culture and personality systems that were in the process of undergoing rapid, and, often catastrophic changes. Around the same time (the 1930's and 1940's), the early work by Wallis and Fulop-Miller on messiahs was superceded by the classificatory schema of Linton, Barber, Kohn, Blumer, Warner and Vogt. The theoretical orientation of much of the empirical research of these sociologists and anthropologists evolved through several stages -- the causal explanations to the "great man" theories -- this to acculturation -- acculturation (or psychological stress) to economic determinism -- to the present anti-particularistic, synoptic (or holistic) approach, the language of which is borrowed from several disciplines in the social and biological sciences (e.g. biology, psychiatry, anthropology, sociology, and comparative religion). At present the study of cults, religious and social movements, sects, and other responses that attract researchers is concentrating less on causal theories and the external evidence that supports them and more on the internal processes and dynamics of a movement (or "response"), while looking to the culture or society in which they occur for various useful insights that may provide a better understanding of the "event" that is taking or has taken place. Again, as Weston La Barre said, "in the study of . . . cults, the word 'and' serves better than the contentious word 'only'."[14]

For example, I have found that there are interesting parallels between far-flung cultic and sect developments and the Church of the Cosmic Liberty (and other improvisational youth groups), including the "leaderless static messianism" of the Yaruro among whom no social "movement" exists, the withdrawal reactions of the Mormons, Mennonites, Doukhobors, and the primitive Christians who sought "flight from the world", and the Manicheist Anabaptists, Beguines, and Hussites who upheld a dualism of light and darkness, spirit and matter together with the idea of the inherent evil of the material world, to mention only a few.[15] The existence of such parallels, or at least my drawing them, has helped to reinforce my conviction that my phenomenological orientation to social life in the youth culture is the one most likely to bear fruit, even though no deductive classificatory paradigm is forthcoming.

With Becker's classic inductive approach to the study of deviants in mind, I have been able to approach the problem of the internal dynamics of the Cosmic Liberty Church and other youth groups with exploratory hypotheses that lie outside the sect and cult areas.[16] In particular, I examined a number of theories of adolescence in order to determine the extent to which they might be applied to the study. Among my subjects can be found the elements of an ideological framework which holds that the larger society of adults defines most of what is wrong with the world, while the culture of youth defines most of what is right. At the root of this ideology is a current which suggests that something in our cultural conditioning of children and youth "produces" a response of which the Church of the Cosmic Liberty is somewhat typical. Recent discussion of this type of response by Berger, Simmons, and Roszak, to mention only a few writers, suggests that the prolongation of adolescence creates the conditions for the emergence of a culture of youth in which conflict with the adult social order is but an expression of the ambiguous status and unprecedented mobility of the young.[17] Since the needs of the social order preclude the admission of the young into the job market at an early age, many young persons are set adrift in a marginal area of society that develops its own characteristic life style. In many instances evidence of the deviant orientations of the young inhabitants of the youth culture testifies to the strain which the prolongation of adolescence places on individuals and the social system. Thus, the conflict between generations and the emergence of a "counter culture" are recurrent themes in the current literature on youth, and a debate has grown up which centers on the question of whether or not the youth of the present are "really" deviant or whether they are merely acting out adolescent and post-adolescent problems and are learning, in some cases in spite of their intentions, to become adults.

The members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty are for the most part young (the average age is around twenty five years), and most have been involved in the kinds of deviant activities that are more or less typical of a minority of the present generation of young people. While the origins of the sect may not necessarily lie in the members' problems with growing up *per se*, it seems obvious that the sect is an alternative to growing up. It is my view that an understanding of the improvisational character of the sect and the conspicuous absense of adult authority therein would not be possible without paying attention to the youth culture in general and to the emergence of experimental communities, living groups and informal youth organizations that appear to require a high level of commitment on the parts of members in particular. Again, the Church of the Cosmic Liberty represents a kind of prototype of a new, improvisational youth group. As I said in the last chapter, the unique thing about improvisational youth groups is that they promote the development of psychic mobility and role distance among their members. This in turn facilitates a young person's remaining in the youth culture on a "permanent" basis and in fact contributes to the viability of the youth culture as a whole.

Thus, in addition to attempting to understand the nature of the sect members' involvement in the religious life, I found it useful to examine their behavior and attitudes with respect to their conception of themselves as young people growing up in a hostile society. Not only do they identify with religious concerns, therefore, but they feel that they share the outlook of the hippies and other dissident groups in society who have rejected the middle class way of life. The members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty, as I have demonstrated, look upon themselves as "hip devotees" whose religious convictions and secular involvements place them more in the camp of the "underground" than with orthodox Christianity or Hinduism.

The present study, thus, had a dual emphasis: It was first of all concerned with the manner in which the members of the Church of the

XUM

Cosmic Liberty improvised a life style which appears to have enabled them to transform the search for identity from a transitional stage into a permanent way of life; and, second, the study was concerned with the socioligical relationship between the Church of the Cosmic Liberty and other groups in the youth culture that likewise practice and improvise upon similar styles of life.

The data I collected on the Church of the Cosmic Liberty fall into two broad categories. The first category deals with the sect's social organization and structure, while the second includes the evidence which I gathered on the internal processes that make the social life in the sect viable. In addition, in order to place the sect in its proper socio-cultural context, I presented some of the materials which I gathered on rock and roll bands and on marijuana dealing groups while the study of the sect was in progress. Again, these data were used to show what the Church of the Cosmic Liberty has in common -- beyond the external features -- with a few of the improvised arrangements that dot the contemporary landscape. Thus, although the study is of the type that relies on the use of descriptive materials, in the first chapter and in the final chapter as well, I attempted to lay the foundation for a sociological theory that will hopefully lend a broader understanding to the types of youth groups found in American society.

It might now be appropriate to summarize briefly the manner in which I actually went about the business of collecting the data which comprise the main body of this work. The members of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty, as previously implied, were not particularly appreciative of my professional interest in them, so in order to preserve my precarious status and keep conflicts to a minimum (and opportunities open), I refrained from taking notes in their presence. This did not prove to be a severe limitation, for I was able to reconstruct on paper my mental recordings of events, conversations, themes, circumstances, and situations after I had left the "field" and was once again in the privacy of my home. I made a habit of writing on any phenemenon that caught my interest, whether or not it appeared directly relevant to the study as a whole. In this way I believe that I was able to preserve the integrity of my phenomenological approach and to prevent myself from both "going native" and relegating certain data that did not particularly "fit" my ideas and my interests into the background.

In going over my field notes, some of which are unfortunately not dated, I find that I made a total of fifteen visits to the area in which the Church of the Cosmic Liberty is located. Some of these visits lasted for several days, while others were of a week's duration or longer. The average visit was around five days, and during each visit my wife and I stayed either with "Sheryl" or with "Shivadas" and "Peaches." Over a period of four years, beginning in the summer of 1967 before the "church" was formally recognized by the State of California, and ending in March of 1972, we spent around six months with the members. Still, I did not meet all of the members, since membership is ill-defined outside the core group of fifteen or so people. My findings, then, center around this "inner circle" of religionists and are only minimally concerned with the thirty or so additional members, some of whom are more committed to the sect than others. In all, I would estimate that I had occasion to meet and communicate with and observe all but ten members; that is, around forty people.

Again, the conditions under which my investigation was conducted did not allow me to conduct interviews in the sense that a person or group of persons I was talking to knew that an interview was, in fact, being held. I was, nevertheless, able to "plan" discussions with people by having in mind beforehand a series of topics or questions which I would introduce into the conversation at an appropriate moment. On one occasion I conducted a tape-recorded interview with one of the directors and his wife on the subject of child-rearing, but this was not very successful due to the fact that my role as a sociologist was brought to the foreground by the presence of the microphone. The subjects gave rather terse answers answers to my questions and seemed reluctant to reveal very much of an opinion on the topic at hand. Other instances of my precarious position being brought into the open inspired me to rely instead on my more or less unobtrusive observations of daily life in the sect. Indeed, I was made aware that social life in the sect is woven on extremely delicate fabric, and the slightest interference on

XUM

my part nearly always caused turmoil. So, instead of forcing my sociological perspective on others by consciously playing the role of the outside observer, I adopted the approach of waiting to see what would transpire next in a given situation. This approach was supplemented with innocent, yet pointed questions.

In July, 1971 when I informed Shivadas, a director of the Church of the Cosmic Liberty, that I intended to use the materials that I had collected on his group in a doctoral dissertation, I expected him to be pleased because we have become friends over the years. But instead of giving me his blessing, as it were, he shrugged his shoulders and remarked that I am, perhaps, well-qualified to write on the sect, since my biases against the members' life style are cancelled out by my latent spirituality, which, though submerged beneath the surface of an unseemly worldly intransigence and the typical sociologist's hauteur, would serve me well in my task. Although at first I interpreted this remark as a put-down, I later realized that it revealed an ambivalent attitude on Shivadas' part, which, under the circumstances, was to be expected. After all, a calculated indifference to what does on in the world is, in a sense, what the Cosmic Liberty Church is all about. But more than this, I think that his attitude testifies to his continuing preoccupation with the religious life and the search for identity and to my own lack of impact on him and the other members of the Church.

XUM

Footnotes to Appendix II

1. An "adventist sect . . . expects drastic, divine intervention and awaits a new dispensation." An "introversionist sect . . . is pietistic in its orientation, withdrawing from the world to cultivate its inner spirituality." A "gnostic sect . . . offers some special esoteric religious knowledge." See Thomas F. O'Dea, "Sects and Cults," in David L. Sils (ed.), International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (New York: The MacMillan Co. and The Free Press, 1968), 14: 133.

2. Florence R. Kluckholn, "The Participant-Observer Technique in Small Communities," American Journal of Sociology 46 (November, 1940) 331.

3. Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer, "Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison," in William J. Filstead (ed.), Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement in the Social World (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1970), p. 133; and, Howard S. Becker, "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation," in W. J. Filstead (ed.), Qualitative Methodology, p. 189.

4. A noteworthy exception to the rule, which I unfortunately did not discover until the present study was nearly completed is John F. Lofland, Analyzing Social Settings (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1970). Dr. Lofland's work is a suitable how-to-do-it manual on participant observation, and it contains several useful bibliographies on the subject.

5. Arthur J. Vidich, "Participant Observation and the Collection and Interpretation of Data," in W. J. Filstead (ed.), Qualitative Methodology, p. 166.

6. Severyn T. Bruyn, "The Methodology of Participant Observation," in W. J. Filstead (ed.), Qualitative Methodology, pp. 305-306.

7. Alfred Schutz, "Some Leading Concepts of Phenomenology," in Maurice Natanson (ed.), Essays in Phenomenology (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), pp. 27, 29.

8. Morris S. Schwartz and Charlotte G. Schwartz, "Problems in Participant Observation," American Journal of Sociology 60 (January, 1955), 350.

9. Alfred Schutz, "Some Leading Concepts of Phenomenology," p. 27.

10. Severyn T. Bruyn, "The Methodology of Participant Observation," p. 307.

11. Severyn T. Bruyn, "The New Empiricists: The Participant Observer and the Phenomenologist," in W. J. Filstead (ed.) *Qualitative Methodology*, p. 284.

12. See David Matza, *On Becoming Deviant* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969).

13. So as to be better equipped to distinguish between orthodox Hinduism and its various heterodox interpretations, I established contact with a monk of the Ramakrishna Order who has given me much information on Eastern philosophy, in addition to discussing with me the hagiographa of India and the various systems of yoga. I must, of course, take credit for any inadvertent misrepresentations of Vedanta, the Vedanta Society, the Ramakrishna Order of India, and the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna that appear in the text.

14. Weston La Barre, "Materials for a History of Studies of Crisis Cults: A Bibliographic Essay," *Current Anthropology* (12: 1, February, 1971), 3-44. Quote appears on pp. 20-21.

15. Weston La Barre, "Materials for a History of Studies of Crisis Cults," pp. 3-44.

16. For a discussion of Howard S. Becker's inductive methodology, see his *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

17. See Bennett M. Berger, *Looking for America*; Jerry L. Simmons and Barry Winograd, *It's Happening*; Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*; and, Gary Schwartz, *Youth Culture: An Anthropological Approach*.

XUM

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barnett, H. Ross, Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953.

Becker, Howard S., Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance. New York: Free Press, 1963.

____________ and Blanche Geer, "Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison," in W. J. Filstead (ed.), Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement with the Social World. Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1970.

____________, "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation," in W. J. Filstead (ed.), Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement with the Social World. Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1970.

Benedict, Ruth, "Continuities and Discontinuities in Cultural Conditioning," Psychiatry, Vol. 1 (May, 1938).

Berger, Bennett M., Looking for America: Essays on Youth, Suburbia and Other American Obsessions. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971.

Berger, Peter L., A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Anchor Books, 1970.

____________, Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Anchor Books, 1963.

____________ and Thomas Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality, Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Anchor Books, 1969.

Bosserman, Phillip, Dialectical Sociology: An Analysis of the Sociology of Georges Gurvitch. Boston: Porter-Sargent, Extending Horizons Books, 1968.

Bruyn, Severyn T., "The Methodology of Participant Observation," in W. J. Filstead (ed.), Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement with the Social World. Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1970.

____________, "The New Empiricists: The Participant Observer and the Phenomenologist," in W. J. Filstead (ed.), Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement with the Social World. Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1970.

XUM

Cowley, Malcolm, Exiles' Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's. New York: Viking Press, 1934.

Damrell, Joseph, "The Dealer" (Master's Thesis, University of California, Davis, 1968).

Deutsch, Eliot, Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction. Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1969.

Eisenstadt, S. N., From Generation to Generation. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964.

Erikson, Erik, "Youth Fidelity and Diversity," in Erik Erikson (ed.), Youth: Change and Challenge. New York: Basic Books, 1963.

___________, Youth: Change and Challenge. New York: Basic Books, 1963.

Evens-Wentz, W. Y., Tibetan Book of the Dead. London: Oxford University Press, 1936.

Filstead, William J., Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement with the Social World. Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1970.

Gambhirananda, Swami, History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957.

___________, Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother. Madras: B.N.K. Press, Ltd., 1955.

Gandhi, Mahatma, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. Delhi: Navajivan Press, 1967.

Goffman, Erving, Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1961.

Gibran, Kahlil, The Prophet. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

Gupta, Mahendranath (trans. by Swami Nikhilananda), The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942.

Isherwood, Christopher, Ramakrishna and His Disciples. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965.

Keniston, Kenneth, The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965.

Kluckholn, Florence R., "The Participant-Observer Technique in Small Communities," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 46 (November, 1940), p. 331.

La Barre, Weston, "Materials for a History of Studies of Crisis Cults: A Bibliographic Essay," Current Anthropology, Vol. 12, No. 1 (February, 1971), p. 3.

Lofland, John F., Analyzing Social Settings. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1971.

Mascaro, Juan (trans.), The Upanishads. Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1969.

Mathison, Richard, Faiths, Cults and Sects of America. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1960.

Matza, David, Delinquency and Drift. New York: Wiley Press, 1964.

__________, On Becoming Deviant. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969.

__________, "Subterranean Traditions of Youth," The Annals (American Academy of Political and Social Science), Vol. 338 (1961), p. 102.

Mead, George Herbert, Mind, Self and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

Muller, F. Max, Ramakrishna: His Life and Teachings. London: Longmans, Green, 1898.

Natanson, Maurice (ed.), Essays in Phenomenology. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.

O'Dea, Thomas F., "Sects and Cults," in David L. Sils (ed.), International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. New York: The MacMillan Company and The Free Press, 1968. Vol. 14, p. 133.

Parsons, Talcott, "Youth in the Context of American Society," in Erik Erikson (ed.), Youth: Change and Challenge. New York: Basic Books, 1963.

Prabhavananda, Swami and Christopher Isherwood (trans. and commentary), How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali. New York: New American Library, Signet Books, 1969.

__________ and Christopher Isherwood (trans.), Shankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination. Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1968.

__________, The Sermon on the Mount According to the Vedanta. Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1968.

XUM

___________ and Christopher Isherwood (trans.), The Song of God: Bhagavad Gita. New York: New American Library, Signet Books, 1951.

___________ and Frederick Manchester (trans.), The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal. Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1968.

Robbins, Thomas, "Eastern Mysticism and the Resocialization of Drug Users: The Maher Baba Cult," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 3 (Fall, 1969), p. 308.

Rolland, Romain (trans. by E. F. Malcolm-Smith), Prophets of the New India. New York: A and C Boni, 1930.

Roszak, Theodore, The Making of a Counter Culture. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Anchor Books, 1969.

Saradananda, Swami (trans. by Swami Jagadananda), Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master. Mylapore, Madras: Published by the President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1952.

Schutz, Alfred, "Some Leading Concepts of Phenomenology," in Maurice Natanson (ed.), Essays in Phenomenology. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.

___________, "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 49 (May, 1944).

Schwartz, Gary, Youth Culture: An Anthropological Approach. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Modular Publications, Vol. 17 (1972).

Schwartz, Morris S. and Charlotte G. Schwartz, "Problems in Participant Observation," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 60 (January, 1955), p. 350.

Selznick, Philip, Leadership in Administration. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.

Sils, David L. (ed.), International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. New York: The MacMillan Company and The Free Press, 1968.

Simmons, J. L. and Barry Winograd, It's Happening. Santa Barbara: Marc-Laird Publications, 1966.

Thus Spake Sri Krishna. Mylapore, Madras: Published by the President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1968.

Thus Spake Sri Ramakrishna. (Swami Suddhasatwananda, compiler), Mylapore, Madras: Published by the President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1968.

XUM

Thus Spake Vivekananda. Mylapore, Madras: Published by the President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1969.

Vidich, Arthur J., "Participant Observation and the Collection and Interpretation of Data," in W. J. Filstead (ed.), Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement with the Social World. Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1970.

Vivekananda, Swami, Bhakti-Yoga. Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas: Published by Swami Chidatmananda, President, Advaita Ashrama, 1964.

___________, Jnana-Yoga. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1955.

Weber, Max (ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich), Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology. New York: Bedminster Press, 1968.

___________, (ed. by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale), The Religion of India. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958.

Westley, William and Fredrick Elkin, "The Myth of Adolescent Culture," American Sociological Review, Vol. 20 (1955), p. 680.

Wilhelm, Richard and Cary F. Barnes (trans.), The I Ching or Book of Changes. New York: Pantheon Books, 1966.

Yinger, Milton, "Contra-culture and Subculture," American Sociological Review, Vol. 25 (1960), p. 625.

Yogananda, Paramahamsa, Autobiography of a Yogi. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1969.

___________, Whispers From Eternity. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1959.

Zimmer, Heinrich (ed. by Joseph Campbell), The Philosophies of India. New York: Pantheon Books, 1953.

XUM